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MISTRESS HASELWODE.

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MISTRESS HASELWODE,

A TALE OF THE REFORMATION OAK.

A NOVEL IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

F. H. MOORE.

VOL. I.

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MISTRESS HASELWODE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was May-day in the old town of Windham — named by its Saxon founders "the pleasant village on a mount"—and a right gay and merry day the Windham folks clearly meant to make of it.

For the houses of the burghers in the chief streets were decked out with banners of varied coloured stuffs drooping from the lattices, and with festoons of green leaves, hung with garlands, stretching across the narrow road.

The peasants' cots, too, in the bye-lanes leading off the bettermost streets were smartly tricked with boughs, and wreaths of golden buttercups and silvery daisies, with here and there a bunch of bright blue-bells tied to the end of a pole projecting from the little dormers.

Nor had the old Abbey Church of S. Mary the Virgin been forgotten, but was vested in its annual May-day garb; there, from its great west tower floated lazily in the breeze the flag of merrie England. Many such days that church had witnessed, as it stood with its lines of bold-capped columns, and rounded arches of Norman type, zigzagged and tooth-moulded by the cunning hands of artificers, directed by the skilful monks, who lived in the adjacent Priory. Here, fraternity after fraternity had enjoyed undisturbed possession from the time of Prior Daubeney in the days of

the 1st Henry, and since till the 8th, who had turned them adrift and taken fast hold of their lands, but a few years before our story opens.

Beneath that Church—the monument of their art—rested in peace the silent dust of good Daubeney and many another prior, who had in turn served before its altars and with his monks expended the revenues in dispensing hospitality and charity to all needy comers.

Although the day had not long dawned, all the town was stirring; for in those times folks went early to bed, and early rose, either for work or pleasure. It was, however, quite evident that but little work was to be done on this day, for already at their cottage doors stood the comely housewives, or their sturdy spouses, peeping forth to see what the morning betokened.

And, in truth, it was an enlivening pros-

pect for that holiday which greeted their eager gaze. The sun had risen brightly, and was shedding his gilding beams on the moss-grown, thatched roofs and trim gardens of the cottages; on the flint-dressed walls, gurgoyled cornices, and crockets of the Church; and on the peaked gables, mullioned casements, steep red-tiled roofs, and carved oaken beams of the well-to-do burghers' dwellings; making the tiny lattice lights twinkle, diamond-like, with his glinting brightness in the soft grey of this May morn.

The neighbouring meadows and gardens, too, sent forth the sweet essences of the white-flecked bushes, and of the early flowers, which, wafted by the gentle wind, impregnated the air with delicious sweetness; while the warbling notes of thrushes and song birds, tickled the ears with melody.

Ah! May-day of old, with all thy merry light-hearted frolics, and all thy rustic joys and sorrows; how many a long year has since rolled by and buried these memories deep in oblivious shade! Yet, let the misty veil of time be for once uplifted, and that May-day frolic live again for a little space!

Soon the clang of the bells sounding forth from the church tower—those evangelist bells, dedicated long since when blessed by good Prior Daubeney—summoned from their homes the expectant revellers, who, coming out of their open doors, mingle together and exchange morning greetings as they wend their way towards the well-known Town green, where the May-pole will presently be reared.

Youths and damsels, gammers and gaffers, all are making holiday, with even the old grandsires, who, trudging on by the help of

their stout ashen sticks, recall to their accompanying dames in quavering tones that May-day of theirs long gone by, when first love taught them, while but lad and lass, its sweet lesson.

And a picturesque assemblage, too, are they all in their festal garments. Women and girls wearing their best petticoats of gay-coloured stuffs, with neat white kerchers pinned on their heads, and puffed linen sleeves fastened at the wrist by a band, intermingle with the men and boys in their round slop, breeches, cloth jerkins, white stockings, square-toed shoes, and flat caps of woven wool, which they carry jauntily on the side of their closely cropped heads.

Each seemed joyous, as was Nature herself; and so this May morn broke.

Windham Green was a large space of common land, lying pleasantly just without the little town, and through it ran a

road leading to the city of Norwich, distant some nine miles or so.

Along this road might even now be seen, at this early hour, many lissom foot passengers trudging over from the city, and from Silfield, Wattlefield, Downham, and other adjacent townships. For Windham May-day, with Windham play, was the great festival of all that country side, and the peasant lads, and bouncing lasses, with the sober burghers, their wives, daughters, and prentices all made holiday, and donned their festive dress to join in the yearly sports.

Here and there, too, some stalwart yeoman on his trotting nag, with his spouse perched up on her pillion, mingled with the pedestrians.

About the taverns hissing ostlers were already busy stabling horses, while the riders were refreshing their thirsty souls

with the good ale of the house; and lively serving wenches were laying out solid food in the shape of buttocks of beef, haunches of mutton, chines, fat capons, large wheaten loaves, and saffron-tinted cheeses in readiness for the mid-day meal, when the exhausted pleasure seekers would be crowding into the neatly sanded parlours of the taverns.

At the sign of the "Falcon," in the Sheep Market, there was more bustle than at any other of the hostels; and it would appear to an observer that the better sort were putting up there, those who came being mostly well horsed, and some attended by their serving men. The visitors who had as yet arrived were gathered together in the long, low-ceilinged room of the Inn, which was used only on these special occasions, when an unusually large party required accommodation, and were holding whispered conver-

sation one with another on some topic of an apparently engrossing character. They were presently joined by a pleasant-looking young fellow, well built, and with Saxon features, blonde hair, and moustache; who, glancing round the group of guests, doffed his cap, and bowed an acknowledgment to their recognition. Then one of them, whose tonsure, on the removal of his cap, betrayed him to be a priest of the unreformed faith, in spite of the disguise of his dress—for these now scarce dare show their faces abroad, being dispossessed of their cures, and many of them hidden away in the houses of the nobility and gentry, who secretly adhered to their former principles—came forward saying,—

"Welcome as May flowers, Master Flowerdew and may the day be indeed far distant, when one of thy staunch stock shall not meet with hearty good will from

all true sons of holy church. Thou hast ridden hard, so methinks 'twere well to taste good Stubb's tap, ere we broach business, for talking is but thirsty work."

"True, father," replied Flowerdew, "a thirsty soul hath no ears; and, by my faith, I know of none so good refresher for serious talk as sound malt liquor, wherefore, I'll bid mine host draw a stoup. Hey! Master Stubbs, come, let us taste this homebrewed, which, to judge by thine own comely paunch, hath no scant measure of malt, for its wholesome strength hath surely advantaged thee."

Host Stubbs, who was in all conscience a fat and pursy soul, and withal a good natured, departed puffing and blowing on his journey to the cellar, amid the laughter of the company; for the old man waddled not unlike his porkers, which were grunt-

ing unmusically in their snug lodging outside the parlour window.

While Host Stubbs is gone for the ale, we will glance at the rest of the company gathered together in the tavern parlour, to the number of some twenty or thirty.

Their master spirit was evidently the priest, whose restless black eyes, thin cut lips, and rapid utterance, discovered a determined and energetic temperament. In truth, the memory of recent wrongs, which he and his brethren had sustained, when the rude servants of the law, at Cromwell's bidding, had turned them forth from their retreat, was ever present to Michael Sykes, ex-prior of Bromeholme; and this had roused all the latent fire and energy of his nature, which before the monotonous routine of his daily life had suppressed;

till now, the sole aim of his active mind was directed towards the recovery of the power and possessions lost by his Church. Near him stood a young man some two and twenty years of age, or so, dressed in the rich fashion of men of quality, in a doublet and hose of dark claret colour hemmed with gold, and with an embroidered waist belt, from which hung his blade in a bright steel scabbard. With a rakish mien, he bore about his countenance, which was handsome, albeit somewhat delicate-featured for a man, the premature lines of self-indulgence. His eyes were black, as was his hair, which he wore according to the style of the day, closely trimmed under a plumed cap. This was Hubert de Burgh, whose father, the Lord de Burgh, had risked his head and estate rather than yield up his faith. To judge, however, by the demeanour of the young De Burgh, he would be made of other

metal than his sire; since his frequent yawns, and restless glances often cast at the window, betrayed that he was hankering after the amusement to be gained from the May-day sports, rather than any matter of serious discussion.

There were also some half-a-dozen others, richly clad, of the degree of gentry, stern and earnest-looking, to whom De Burgh afforded a great contrast. The remaining guests were mainly country yeomen of good substance; but mixed up with them were a few others of no defined station, loose and dissolute in appearance, who seemed to be half gallant, half cut-purse—mere waiters on fortune—and were singularly unlike the rest. All carried side-arms.

Host Stubbs soon re-entered with his wife Bridget, carrying a large black-jack filled with ale, and also smaller flagons, into which the buxom hostess poured the

frothy liquor, and with smirking face handed it round to the guests.

The drink being tossed off, Flowerdew turned to the priest, saying—

"And now that we have washed the dust from out our throats, I pr'ythee tell us, father, how your plans be cast for this day's hurle."

"Right, my son," answered Sykes, "I will enlighten ye forthwith on the course we have mapped out, as suited best in our poor judgment to advantage Holy Church, and to uproot these broad-blown time-servers, who now lie a-clovered in our pastures; ay, and not content, would yet despoil us of the sorry remnant sinful Harry—whom may God reward—hath left us. Is not the memory of the brutal deeds wrought by him alive within us, sirs? Or, have we forgot how, when Sir Ralph Warren was Mayor, the holy Abbot of Fountans, with

the Priors of Gisburg and Bridlington, the learned Doctor Peckering, and Adam Sodbury, Abbot of Jarvis, with many a valiant knight, were hanged, headed and quartered on Tyburn Hill; because, forsooth, they would not desert their church at sensuous Harry's will? But," continued he, waxing warm, "soon shall Cranmer and his strifeful crew feel the hand of a loftier King than puny Edward, whose mother sank to death in his childbed on St. Crispin's eve; and on whose boyish brow King Death hath already set his mark, if all be true that meets the ear—too soon ripe, soon rotten!—but enough; now, gentle sirs, list ye to our plan. When next we meet on yon green, 'twill then be the time for daring acts; and to the guiding of such, we poor priests do look to your bold arms, sharp swords, and ready courage; and remember—success doth ever tread the footsteps of

the bold. Mayhap ye know that even now the Devonshire men, led by that worthy Captain, Sir Humfrey Arundel, have arisen in defence of their ancient Church's rights, and by a trusty messenger I do hear that they be sate down before Exeter, whence they will not budge till the city be yielded up, I'll warrant you. While the men of Buckingham and Oxford have aroused from their torpor, and begun to bestir them; four thousand men, who will not blench. Shall then, we Norfolk men, be deedless with so earnest a bodement of success?"

Murmurs of approval met the priest's appeal, and he went on—"It hath been fixed to act the play of the Scriveners, which depicteth the miracle of Christ's appearance to holy Peter, James and John, and the faithless Thomas—See, here be the very men who will enact," pointing to four debonair looking fellows, whose appearance

easily showed them to be of the race of stage players, "a broad piece or two hath secured their good service in getting this play chosen, for actors are scarce in these parts, and they did by favour of mine hire protest to Master Bailiff, that no other play could they enact. Come forward, Harry Killigrew, Bob Dighton, Dick Cockbill, and Jack Jeffcoat, and speak to this goodly company for yourselves."

In response to the priest's invitation, Killigrew, as spokesman, stepped forward, and bowing with tragedy grace, and no lack of assurance, to the guests, said:—

"How think ye, fair sirs, shall we play our parts? I'faith, methinks the Arch pastor, Master Cranmer himself, will scarce approve our playing, or will own us sheep of his flock, rank Protestants though we be; for he holdeth these Scripture enactments but as Popish mumming, and had

he gleaned a grain of knowledge as to the miracle acting—why, he would have forbid the game. I befear me then we poor actors are but on the road to jail, when our procedure reacheth his ears, an ye prevail not in this business. Yet, what reck we," added he, singing a snatch with a nasal twang—

> "We're for him who pays us quick,
> Protestant, or Catholic—"

"So, your worships, were we fain to take this reverend father's palm; when he, hearing we were chose to play at the May acting, did persuade us to try the Scrivener's piece, and here we be at your service."

"Here, too," said the priest, "is Will Lively, who hath played in the Globe afore Wanton Harry and his Court, he will enact the chiefest part."

"Trust me," spake up Will, "for a right proper portraiture; and further, credit me,

the Globe company will tell ye how Will Lively can play his part, be it Pope or Devil, King or Beggar, Saint or Sinner, Priest or Preacher, Knave or Fool, Gentle or Churl."

Sykes frowned at Will's familiar boldness of speech, but retained command over his well-trained temper; and muttering to himself, "One catcheth more flies with honey than with vinegar," replied jestingly to the perky play actor, "Well, well, Master Will, see that thou makest good thy boast, else wilt be held but a cavtel chatterbox."

Then turning to the company, "So far, good friends, ye see our plan; yet must I further advise ye of the part which I have pledged me to bear in the coming hurle. First am I to be bookholder in the play, so shall I keep them to the mark; then 'twill be mine, by special

agreement with them, to come forth on the stage, when I purpose holding such speech as shall stir up the deep-set passions of the people, which in all honest truth do now but slumber, but, when they have drunk them chokeful of ale, trust me, these Norfolk country folk, and smerky 'prentice lads, will be ready for any devilment—when the belly's full the music goeth the better—so I hope to fan the sparks, which deep-mouthed Will must kindle, like waving stammel cloth before a herd of cattle, to such a flame as shall singe that arch heretic Cranmer, spite his seeming power, and squelsh him with his co-plotters in one ruin. But now must we part till noon, when all should keep tryst on the Green, and wait a fitting moment for the signal—'twixt now and then much yet lieth before me—some score or so trusty helpers are awaiting speech without, and I may no

longer delay — Farewell, then, for the nonce."

With which the priest left the room, accompanied by a small number of the party; and he, whom we know as Flowerdew, turned to the others, saying:—

"By the mass, good sirs, methinks our holy father hath laid his train with some discernment, I trust naught may hap to mar his plans; yet to waste more of this bright May sun, would be a grievous sin, so I'll e'en go too awhile, and watch the lissom rustics at their games."

CHAPTER II.

"More matter for a May morning."—
TWELFTH NIGHT.

MASTER FLOWERDEW, on leaving the rest of the company at the Falcon to discuss Host Stubbs' ale and their plans, turned down the Sheep Market, and made his way through the gathering crush towards the Green. Among the crowd he saw, here and there, some whose appearance of dare-devil carelessness betokened they were there for no good purpose; and once he caught a glimpse of the Priest, guised by a long cloak, in an animated talk with one of these gallants, by which he concluded they formed a part

of the little band hired by him to lead the day's racket. But his quick eye observed also that these gentry were not regarded with much favour by the country folk, for many of the rustic youths seemed disposed to resent the leering glances cast on their modest sweethearts by these hardened worldlings. All this Flowerdew noting, soliloquised—"I much befear me the good Priest's ardour hath o'er stepped the bounds of his judgment, for scarce ever saw I more unpromising comrades than these ill-favoured curs."

Turning the corner of the street, Flowerdew found himself on the verge of the crowd gathered on the Green, by this time swollen with visitors from Dereham, Hingham, Attleburgh, and other towns within reach, and a rare medley, too, it was. Portly burghers and their wives walked along with stately carriage as they received

respectful salutes from their prentices and menials; the worthy traders being easily distinguished from the yeomen and country-folks by the extra spruceness of their attire. Here and there also strutted some young gentle, casting his killing glances at the smiling maidens.

Among them all went one on whom eyes of disfavour were turned by many a fellow burgher, and many a gentle; which looks were as boldly returned by the stout recipient; for Master Robert Ket, the tanner, of Windham, was both rich and thriving, and had, too, by many a bold act proved his unscrupulous daring; holding sway among the prentices and the lower sort, although an object of special dislike to the surrounding lords of the soil, on whose manorial rights he had ere this often rudely trespassed. Moreover, screened by the jealousy of the municipal privileges which the

burghers allowed to all their freemen when claimed, whether or not they approved of the object of their protection, he had openly defied and braved his opponents. Not a few reprisals had, however, been effected by the gentry, for when Ket's fellows would, without leave or heed, venture into the enclosed lands and woods in pursuit of sport, or poach in the well-preserved ponds and meres for pike and carp, then a tussle would often ensue betwixt them and the varlets of the manor, resulting in broken pates and bloodshed, in which the former usually came off but second-best.

Master Ket, moreover, had of late presumed to hold forth among his fellows and the other folk on matters which keenly touched the sensitive pride of the hereditary gentry; and, although his views and theories were distasteful to the leading burghers, still his fiery oratory, albeit rough

and unlearned, had often stirred the lower sort, and would, doubtless, when next heard produce a like commotion.

By every gentle, and in particular by those of the old faith, was Master Robert Ket regarded, in spite of his substance, as an audacious meddler; for, ever since the first movement of the Reformation, had Ket thrust himself forward in these parts as a wholesale reformer, and rendered himself thoroughly obnoxious to all easy-going folks, and to those round about, who had been reared in, and were deeply attached to the faith of their ancestors.

He had also taken advantage of the recent anti-papal crusade to persecute all whom he fell foul of, inciting the prentices and his sympathisers to commit summary acts of violence regardless of law.

Robert Ket was a strongly-built, large-limbed man, with a countenance betraying

powerful and sensuous passions, and having a dogged look about him, as of a man obstinate and self-willed. With him walked William Ket, whose likeness to his brother shewed him to be a chip of the same block; but his features betokened the indecision of character of a man more calculated to follow than to lead.

As they went along, exchanging greetings with sundry of their acquaintance, they were presently joined by one, whose lengthened visage and sad-coloured garments unmistakeably marked him as a Preacher of the ultra-Protestant section of the unsettled Church.

"Give ye good day, my masters," exclaimed he, "are ye then bound for this May play? Ah!" sighed the good man, "I would that this land of ours were purged of all the remnant of these idolatrous vanities."

"Tut, tut, parson Whitehead," returned

Robert, "dost think thee, man, that youth and merriness will be tamed by all thy preaching? I tell thee nay, let them have their frolic. Marry, 'tis not so long since thyself played handball at Easter for tansy cakes. Be content, hast thou already drunk so deep of godliness that thou canst not stomach so small a draught of pleasure?"

"Peace, friend Robert," replied the parson, "nor taunt me with thy jests, which are but unseemly. I fear me that our recent preachments have not duly edified, and that thou art backsliding; else thou wouldst at least have joined me in making end of all this mumming, which is but one of Satan's devices to lure our children back to Romish wiles. Verily, I have oft bethought me, thou only didst join with us for thine own worldly ends, and not for the just cause of Heaven."

"Marry, then, if that be so, Master

Whitehead," cried Ket, "at least we may cry quits; for thou hast got a snug parson house, and some score acres of the Prior's glebe to boot."

The parson, in a heat, was about to reply, when their attention was distracted by the hurrahs of the crowd; and so Master Robert escaped further sermonising. The shouting heralded the approach of the pole; and groups of lads and maids appeared nearing the green, with in their midst some twenty meek-eyed oxen, festooned with flowers around their necks, and each with a nosegay tied to the tips of his horns, dragging a rough carriage, on which was the pole gaily painted in stripes of blue, red and white, and tricked out with many a branch of birch and fennel sprig, with may-boughs, garlands of flowers, and silken ribbons.

As the cavalcade was spied approaching, long and lusty cheers were raised, and kept

up till the oxen and their burden had reached the green; when the pole was removed from its rough and ready carriage, and a band of sturdy fellows began the task of rearing it, which was safely done, and in all its bravery the pole spread its trappings to the soft breeze.

Then the hustling crowd opened its ranks to allow a smart procession to pass, as there came on the scene the Lord and Lady of May. The lord, apparelled as Robin Hood, in a fanciful costume of green, led by the hand his "ladye faire," clad in a petticoat and kercher of simple white, as Maid Marian; while Little John with bow and arrows, and Friar Tuck in his monkish garb, with all the gay company of the Greenwood, followed, waiting on Robin and Marian. Many morris dancers gaily skipped about them, all in fantastic dress, and hung with dozens of little bells, which jingled as they

danced, and added to the excitement of the revellers, who greeted Robin and his maid with loud plaudits, modestly acknowledged by them, as they progressed towards the pole.

Then the attendant youths and maidens joining hands, danced and capered round them, again and again, keeping up the sport till downright faint with fatigue, when they in turn were succeeded by others, and so the simple folks began their May-day games.

Will Dickson, the Lord of May, was a fine sun-browned springal, and seemed mightily proud of his Lady, pretty Peggy Goodeve, daughter of Master Goodeve, a substantial yeoman, living at Downham, but a short way out of Windham, from whose woods and fields many of the green boughs which decorated the town had been cropped.

And, in sooth, Peggy was a fair sight to look on, when one of the ministering maidens, deputed by her fellows, stepped forward and placed on her brow the tinsel crown, which betokened her dignity.

Well, indeed, might Will feel proud as he gazed on the girl's sweet face all aglow with modest blushes ; while many an envious sheep's-eye was cast, and many a cap was doffed to the blue-eyed May Queen. Both lord and queen seemed to satisfy their courtiers.

Among the crowd, and near to the pole, stood Mistress Margery Goodeve with her stalwart spouse.

"By my troth, goodman," cried the dame, with all a mother's pride, "Will Dickson doth not mislike our Peggy's comeliness—a prettier pair I scarce ever saw."

"Ah ! wife," answered Goodeve, "that

be true, i'faith ; yet do I somehow feel but sad and sorehearted ; for last night I dreamt our lass lay asleep on the high bank, alongside the Kinecroft, befringed even as now, and in this selfsame white petticoat. Then when I looked, lo ! her bed was of sweet savoured violets,—and well thou knowest, that to dream of violets with one thou lovest well, on May eve betokeneth coming sorrow. Somehow I'm minded of evil Mayday, when the prentice hurle was in Cheap, all over Master Lincoln playing buckler on May eve against the Lord Cardinal's commands—you heard tell how he was strung up for his game ?"

"Tut, tut," answered Margery, cheerily, "why dost let such bawbling fancies fret thee, man ? Hath not good Cranmer said that dreams are but idle superstitions, Satan-sprung ? Rather, sweetheart, let us dream of our Maying, long since, when

thou wast Robin and I thy Marian—scarce then thought I the day would come when we should stand by and see our own lass trip it with her Robin. Lack a day! how quick the years do speed! But, see, here be the milkmaids!"

As she spoke, a group of bouncing maidens came along, hand in hand, forming a ring, in the centre of which skipped the chief dairymaid. This buxom wench bore on her head a marvellous erection of tankards and vessels, ornamented with green sprays; while those forming the ring were also decked out with flowers, and each carried a pail on her head with much dexterity. Two antiquated musicians marched along with them, and discoursed such lively strains as their instruments—which consisted of a species of fiddle, and a drounslate, or round narrow drum, suspended from the neck, and thrashed with

fierce vigour by the performer—could produce. Many, however, was the copper coin which the free-handed spectators dropped into the little box, at the soft entreaty of the coquettish dairymaid; and not a few silver pieces, too, for the crowd was leavened by a fair sprinkling of gallants, whose rich dress and plumed caps easily distinguished them. Among the concourse might be seen swarthy Egyptians, both men and women, the latter plying their art of palmistry among the credulous fair of their own sex, while the men picked up stray coins by sleight of hand, and pilfering from the simple folk.

Then, too, there were the purveyors of household gear, such as flax, bed linen, books, wax, and the like; hawkers, with their baskets filled with tempting wares, pewter mugs, wooden spoons and brooches, bawling out their prices; and sharp-

tongued pedlars, with their packs of sarcenet, woollen cloths of sundry colours, cauls, scarves, and kerchiefs, driving a brisk trade, and lessening the capacity of their packs by increasing the weight of their pouches, as the country yokels treated their gratified sweethearts to ribbons and fallals. On the outskirts of the fair little knots of lads and young men were testing their skill in games of trap ball, wrestling, leaping, and other manly sports.

So were the merry folks killing this May morning, all seeming bent on taking their fill of pleasure, till, the time for mid-day meal having come, Robin led the May Queen—preceded by the musicians, and followed by the tinkling morris dancers—to the sign of the Barley Mow, in the market, where was provided for their refection substantial food and flagons of sound home-brewed; for in these days modest

dames and tender lasses quaffed their ale, and vowed the liquor good.

After them the rest of the company also gradually dispersed, all to recruit their spirits, preparatory to the great event of the yearly May-day—the acting of the Dramatic Mystery.

Then, for the space of an hour, the streets rested in quiet, save where little parties of peasantry might be seen under the friendly shade of tree, or wall, eating their simple prog; and through the opened windows were heard the laughter and songs of the feasting revellers.

After awhile, the hum of voices and tramp of feet told that the people were turning out again, having satisfied their healthy appetites, and were hurrying down the narrow streets towards the Green; for by this the Church dial marked the noon, and at half after was to commence the great play acting.

CHAPTER III.

"What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor,
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause."
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

IN the centre of the green stood the stage—a platform of wood, supported at each corner by a square-cut post, which was continued up to form a bearer of the covered top. This roof was hipped to the centre, where was a stop finial springing out of a moulded base, and along the hips ran crockets, fashioned after the shape of oak leaves. The finial formed the bearer of a pennant, on which was delineated the picture of "Our Ladye"—the traditional patroness of May. Round the roof went a parapet carved into miniature battlements,

with, at each of the four corners, a pinnacled terminal. The whole was curtained in front with gaudy hangings of stuff, interwoven with gold threads, and was draped behind and below the platform with a plainer material to hide the rough wooden planking. On the centre of the curtain was an emblematic device—a cross and Jacob's ladder, grouped together, forming the chief feature. Near the stage stood a couple of trumpeters, whose especial business it was to herald each act with a flourishing roulade. The people were kept clear of the stage for a space of some three yards or so, roundabout, by stakes of wood set at intervals and connected together by ropes. The trumpets' bray being now heard, all pressed forward to get a good sight, and then the hum of the crowd was soon hushed and turned into silence, as the curtains were drawn from the front, and the actors dis-

covered posed for their parts, each being suitably vested.

The play was carried on in a rhythmical dialogue, representing the miraculous appearance of Christ to SS. Peter, James, John and Thomas, the actors alternately saying a verse. While it proceeded with the attendant scenic display and illusions, the hushed and superstitious people, on whose ignorant minds the performance produced a deep impression, watched every action, and drank in every utterance of the actors, as they recited in the quaint words of the Scriveners that familiar history.

When the last line was spoken, Lively went quickly to the back of the stage, and drawing aside a curtain disclosed the priest robed in the canonicals of Rome, whom he took by the hand and led to the front, the other actors grouping behind them. Then, before the spectators had time to

recover of their awe, Sykes addressed them :—

"Good friends, ye have just heard, as once before were spoke, the words of power deputed to the priests of God—the power to bind and loose men's sins on earth. Take then a pattern from holy Thomas, who, first an unbeliever, yielded him a willing servant to his God. So if ye give a due obedience to His true servants, shall ye be loosed from your grievous sins. Are not these Protestants, now-a-days, but as the Jews of old, concerning whom ye heard just anow, Peter, James, and John, lament the woe they wrought them, even to driving them forth out of their very birthland? Thus is it with us, the poor priests of God, homeless and churchless are we; chased and hunted, even as wild beasts. Men of Norfolk!—ye, whose sires ever loved their fathers' faith, and true as steel clove to

Holy Church, which hath now been so long oppressed, since mighty Wolsey's fall, by these sour-faced Reformers—will ye longer, barren-spirited, abrook their yoke, mere beasts of soil, and still be drove by them? What! when yourselves have seen our Ladye's Sacred Image dishonoured, and torn from out its very shrine, before the altar in yon Abbey Church; and have heard that sainted Beckett's bones have been rudely dragged from their last abiding-place. What! when ye see your faithful Priests ousted, to make room for these new preachers; and when ye know our Nuns, pure brides of Heaven, are turned adrift, to shift as best they may in this sin-steeped land. While, mark ye, even these your cherished games, and Mayday sports are doomed; for are they not now denounced as vain superstitions, savouring of Rome, by all these Reformers? Nay, nay, I know

ye better, Norfolk men; and so I bid ye rouse from your sleep; and now, on this her very festal day, araise our Ladye's banner, and strike a blow for her honour. Methinks, ye Norfolk men dare do all the Kentish men have done."

The speaker's words took magic effect on the crowd, as oil poured on flame, and hums of assent arose on all sides, for they were wrought up by the play; and, as the Priest had foreseen, their passions, excited by the strong liquor freely imbibed, began to usurp the place of joviality, and frolicsome merriment.

Just now, however, as the Priest's ill luck would have it, there occured an incident which seemed likely to divert the attention of the assemblage, now quite ready for mischief, to another quarter. A great commotion was visible on the outskirts of the throng, and all began to rush towards

the spot, where the riot was, leaving the orator with but so poor a hearing, that, disheartened, he was forced to cease awhile. There, De Burgh, with a small knot of gallants, who had been lounging astrut, and amusing themselves by attracting the notice of the rustic damsels, was standing near to the group of May revellers, and from time to time casting glances at Maid Marian, which presently caused the shy May-queen to exhibit signs of confusion; till, at length, incited by the jeers of his companions, he waxed yet bolder, and approaching said:—

"Fair sweetheart, I pr'thee, give me but one sprig of Mayblossom to keep me mindful of thy kind grace. Surely the Queen will grant so slight a boon to her most devoted subject."

The timid girl was turning away from the forward gallant, when, reaching for-

ward, he snatched a posey from her hand, saying,—

"Nay then, sweet one, an thou wilt not compassionate me, I must e'en help myself!"

Will Dickson, fired with indignation at his daring, and, moreover, egged on by others, some of whom called out, "sowle him, Will, sowle him," felt it only due to his queen to assert his dignity as Lord of May; so, without more ado, he seized De Burgh by his right ear, and gave the amorous gallant a sharp tweak, crying,—

"Take that for thy pains, softling, and learn that the Lord of May can protect his Queen from any such a Jackanapes as you."

For a moment, De Burgh, wincing under the pain and disgrace openly put on him, stood overcome with confusion; then, his face all aflame with rage, exclaimed,—

"What! baseborn swinker, darest thou lay hands on me?" and rushed at Will, attempting to draw his word, with the evident intention of taking prompt vengeance. This, however the press of the crowd prevented him from doing; and also closed in on his companions, who were moving forward to his assistance.

Just then Robert Ket's stentorian voice was heard above the clamour,—

"Friends, will ye abrook to see your sweethearts thus served? Marry, it seemeth your May-queen, on her crowning-day, can not be freed of these pestering gallants! Seize him, lads, and let's give the smart popinjay such a wholesome lesson, as he'll not forget in a hurry."

In response to his shout, the excited prentices and rustics rushed on the little band, and, despite their struggles, soon overpowered them. Then the Lord of May

spoke up; "What say ye, comrades, how shall we serve this smerky youth?"

In answer, a woman's shrill voice called out, "Duck him! my masters, duck him! to the pond with him!"

"Marry, yes, to the pond with him!" bawled out Ket; and his cry was quickly caught up, and repeated from mouth to mouth, as the unfortunate De Burgh, struggling desperately, was dragged by the angry yokels from his hustled friends who, already much mauled, availed themselves of the diversion and beat a speedy retreat to avoid a similar fate towards a dirty duck pond, into which, by means of an open ditch, the refuse and filth of sundry cottages near were conveyed. There, amid the boisterous and hearty jeers of the delighted lookers on, the amorous gallant was soused, and soused, and soused again; till, half suffocated and besmirched with

dirt, he was permitted to crawl out, and in his draggled finery, diffusing a most unsavoury smell, left to find his way to his friends as best he could, the crowd dividing to let him pass, and greeting him with many a sneer and sally.

"Now, by the mass!" said Flowerdew, who, with some of those whom we have seen in the parlour of the Falcon, had been standing among the crowd, waiting for the signal from the priest, and had watched this miscarriage of their scheme with much disgust, "I'd say that De Burgh was properly served for a marplot, an it were not for yon asshead tanner's cackling. 'Tis but a week, come to-morrow, that his fellows trapped as fine a buck as ever trod Hethersett bracken, and left poor Dick Bold half dead, when he with some other of my varlets fell on them. Marry! I'd quick have him afore a swainmote, only none can

swear it clear upon him. 'Twere indeed a shame he should get off scot-free, who while he raileth at his betters, hath taken care to enrich himself during the Church's weakness, and now is possessed of more than one fat manor. Perchance, however, we may yet turn the tables on him. Look ye, Will Summers, my bawcock," continued he, turning to one of those standing by, "I know that thou are ready for any dare-devil trick, if it will but fill thy scanty pouch. See you where yon roan cow pastureth afield?—'Twas of old the good Prior's glebe, and is now this fellow Ket's recent gain—dost note how trim he hath made his fencing with quickset hedging? 'Twere worth the trial, to tempt those hallooing varlets to throw his fences all adown; and, having turned the laugh against him, we'll upraise the cry of Church. Come, here be five broad pieces; go, try

them, trust me they'll not refuse; and if thou dost succeed, five more I'll add for thine own pay."

"Will's your man, Sir," cried Summers, "for this, or any other job, where ready wit can buy ready cash," and, taking the coins, he started on the errand, in which his persuasions appeared to succeed, for the crowd were seen in a twinkling to follow him, and, making for the pasture field, quickly set themselves to work the demolition of its neat fences.

Ket marked Will Summers cheering on the throng, and, knowing him for Flowerdew's dependent, had no difficulty in guessing the quarter from whence the attack proceeded; as, running up, he tried all his persuasion to induce them to desist from their work of destruction. But the spirit of mischief, which he had helped to rouse, had inflamed the rioters beyond all control,

and he was forced to look on and witness his much-prized field laid open and waste.

At last his smouldering rage burst out.

"By my soul!" swore he, "I'll have a full payment for this day's work," shaking his brawny fist in the direction where Flowerdew and his abettors were standing. Then, leaping on a wain, which stood near, the tanner boldly braved the storm, crying out in a loud voice—

"Shame on ye, neighbours, that thus work your tyrants' behest on a friend of your own degree. I'll warrant me, the brave Kentish men had not done so, else would they not have driven out from their lands these overbearing gentry, whose skins seem scarce wide enough to hold their swelling pride. Come now, I'll make a pact with ye—a goose's sauce doth serve well for the gander—I've been made your goose; marry! and I'll find ye a gander; for I swear these

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proudlings shall smart, as ye have made me! Hark ye! neighbours, I'll forgive ye all this wanton trespass, if ye'll be but fair, and keep the ball a rolling, till these gentles be repaid in their own coin; ay, and with good interest."

The speaker pausing, more for lack of wind than words, the fickle mob cheered him lustily, singing out, "Hurrah for Ket! Ket for ever!" and their excited gesticulations, and the buzz of their tongues, told that the Tanner had touched a sympathetic chord. Seeing his advantage, he continued—

"Will ye not then bestir yourselves, and follow the good lead have themselves set ye? Or, are ye very cravens, coward-hearted loons? Nay then, I know ye better, you're made of as stockey stuff as them of Kent; you're of like bone and sinew to them; and now dame Fortune bids

ye kiss the hand she holds afore ye, you'll not hang back, I'll warrant—Speak up, friends, what say ye?"

Amid the hubbub and confusion, Will Dickson, carried away by excitement, jumped up on to the wain alongside Ket, and enthusiastically called out, "The Lord of May doth vote you our Captain, Master Ket, for you be just-spoken, and one of us; so, our Captain shall you be. Comrades! we'll all follow Ket." And, waving his hand, Will led the cheers, which rent the air, as the Tanner stood erect in the wain with doffed cap, the idol of the hour, till the throats of the shouters were glad of a rest; when, taking advantage of the lull, he spake up again—

"Friends all, now that ye have, by mouth of the very Lord of the revels, called me to be your Captain, and with your plaudits have approved his choice, I'll promise ye

Ket's no man to cry back, but will prove by his deeds, as he hath often done afore, that ye have not mischose a leader. Yet must ye not only shout, for any craven can do that, but each one bear a part. Hark ye! to-morrow's dawn shall prove what metal ye be cast of; for then, I call on all true Norfolk men to meet their Captain on this green; and, be sure ye come not empty handed, I'll warrant there'll be tough work in plenty to be done—'twixt now and then I've much to tend to, so I'll bid ye all good day."

With which he leaped from the cart and went off through the surging throng towards his dwelling, beckoning to some of his chosen ones to follow him; while the crowd noisily discussed the morrow's programme as they dispersed.

There were not, however, wanting those of the lookers-on who, whether converts to

the new faith or adherents of the old, had viewed these proceedings with dislike and grave distrust; as, gathered in little sets here and there, they watched the progress of the riot.

Worthy Master Jakeman, the saddler, thoughtfully journeying homewards, remarked to his companion, Master Shortreed, the goldsmith:—

"I much mislike Bob Ket's doings, neighbour; an he make good his purpose, 'twill but justly rouse the rage of all the gentles against his class; and we, peaceful traders, will be milked for his saucy pride. Besides, you well wot how these hurles are trades' death blow. Credit me, if he'd but stick to his calling, and keep his hides in pit a full year, instead of a few months, 'twould be better for him and them who buy my saddlery."

"You're right," answered Master Shortreed, who belonged to the old faith, "this Robert Ket hath, in sooth, long been a thorn in our sides; quiet going folks can scarce ever get any peace now-a-days, that he hath indoctrinated these shallow-pated churls with his nonsense. Marry! since he hath become enriched, he's more like an ass fed on beans than aught else I wot of! Reform, forsooth! let him first reform his overbearing ways, and live in conform to law, instead of spouting rank sedition!"

"Ay, ay, Master Shortreed," chimed in another, "that's true enough, Bob Ket's but a sounding pot—hollow within."

Thus, and in a like strain, did many a peaceful burgher hold forth; some taking Ket's part so far as to say that it was a shame to throw his fences down; but qualifying their sympathy by holding that

it was but a reprisal which he deserved; and so on. Meanwhile, the Bailiff and other chief burghers were considering what steps to take in order to prevent the threatened riot.

CHAPTER IV.

"I tell thee, Jack Cade, the clothier, means to dress the Commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it."

KING HENRY VI.

THE tanner, in company with his brother and a few picked followers, on leaving the green went across the Sheep Market, and turned into a narrow street, which branched out of it. Here, he opened a small wicket gate in the wall, and led the way into a good-sized garden, which, in the gathering dusk, seemed to be laid out in stiff patterns of trefoils, quatrefoils, squares and hexagons; but the fragrance of its spring flowers was overpowered by a stronger smell, arising from the adjoining tanyard, where many a hide was pickling.

The house was that of a well-to-do trader, two storied and flint built, the windows having square stone heads with chamfered edges, and substantial mullions. The front doorway was arched, and above it was worked a neat hood mould. Hanging by the side of the door was a bell chain, which Ket pulled vigorously, and his impetuous summons quickly brought to the door a serving girl. Striding in, he led the others, following him, to a long room comfortably wainscotted in oak, which opened off the entrance-hall. There, was a table ready spread with supper, and Ket took his seat at the head of the board, while his guests, boisterously talking over the day's rumpus, settled themselves down, each one getting the best place he could. At the lower end sat his prentices and menials. All fell to with appetites, which did not appear to have

been blunted by the day's events, for the good cheer disappeared from the trenchers with wonderful rapidity. Plenty of malt liquor, too, was swilled to help the meat down.

In due course all were satisfied; and then the host stood up, beckoning for silence, and said,—

"I give ye welcome, friends, a hearty welcome, which ye will best return me by drinking a cup to Reformation, and confusion to the lordlings, who would make free sport with your maidens, and to the gentles, who would despoil us of the earnings of our sweat—Here's to Reformation!"

With which, he tossed off a bumper, and the others followed suit with noisy assent.

Flagon succeeded flagon; and their threats and valourous vaunts waxed louder and louder.

We must now, however, leave them to

their revelry, and the concoction of plans for the more serious business of the morrow, to which they were pledged ; and look in at another party, gathered in the parlour of the Falcon Tavern.

Here were disposed about the room those whom we met there in the morning ; and, amongst them reclining on a sort of couch—having changed his damaged smart garments for a suit of Host Stubb's coarse spun, which hung loosely about his slender person—lay De Burgh, who had received so severe a mauling from the mob. He was pale, except a dark red mark round his right ear, which showed where the Lord of May's brawny hand had inflicted punishment. Altogether he presented a picture calculated to move to pity even those who would reprehend his frivolous behaviour ; for, after all, he was but a youth. Yet, to judge from the sour looks cast on him by the rest,

it would seem but little pity for his condition dwelt in their hearts.

"Thus then," exclaimed the priest, "have vanished into vapour all our well-laid plans, which were so flourishing but a few short hours ago—marred by the amatory folly of yon headstrong youth, which that daring meddler hath with ready wit seized as a fitting cloak for covering all his betters, and our cause, with disrepute! Methinks, Sirs, it were well we forthwith look to our own poor selves, for 'twixt the King's men and Master Ket, we're in but poor plight."

De Burgh flushed at the disappointed priest's rebuke, as he answered him,

"Now, by our Ladye! good father, I do assure thee that I did but jest with the maiden. Methinks, 'tis hard a noble can not pass a joke with the May Queen, as well as a yokel, or a prentice lad!"

"It doth grieve me sorely," returned the priest, "to hear a son of noble Ralph de Burgh (whom may God assoil—ever foremost champion of his Church) so lightly hold her in esteem, as to yield her up a sacrifice to lust's fleeting hopes. Ay, and I marvel, too, that you, Master Andrew Flowerdew, shouldst choose this very day to run a muck with thine old foe."

"Nay, father," replied Flowerdew, "I did but take on me to try divert them to your ends, by the best mode my poor judgment could devise; so, I pr'ythee, be not wrath with one, who did his best for thee; though that fickle jade, Fortune, hath not favoured his endeavour."

"Say no more, Andrew," answered the priest, "but forgive me, an I credited thee not with discretion. My soul hath been grievously vexed by this miscarriage. But now, fair sirs, I must bid ye all farewell—

ere this night's moon doth wane, I must ride for Thorpe, where fair Mistress Haselwode awaiteth in anxiety the result of our effort. I do not, however, despair but that we may yet work out our ends in some other fashion—when the train be laid, ye shall have timely warning—till then, farewell!"

After the priest, others of the party slipped off, one by one, till none were left save Flowerdew, De Burgh, and Lively; and the former, whose kindly blue eyes showed sympathy for the unfortunate noble, said;

"Come, Lord Hubert, cheer up! What, if the good priest hath been somewhat hard upon us? Surely 'tis to be excused, for he did regard thee as the prime cause of the mishap; and, i' faith, was after disinclined to credit my poor wit with bare justice. What's done is past mending; we must

console us with the hope of better luck next time."

"Marry! Flowerdew, I'd forgive the anger which his wasted oratory maybe warranted; but, I protest, 'twas not fair to make me scape-goat for both sides, I did but move towards a wench, and thou didst but repay a tiny sum of the long score owed to this Tanner. I could not tell the churls would take me so amiss, and you scarce could have dreamt that bold-faced brawler would so quick have enchained them; but fret not, my back's broad enough to bear this wrathful priest's scoldings. Methinks, good friend, we must not longer sojourn here, so I make bold to claim thine hospitality. Faugh! how the stink of that foul duck pond sticketh to one, I'd be glad of a sweet water bath."

"My poor house at Hethersett is at thy service, De Burgh," replied Flowerdew,

"whither we had best quickly journey, and stand prepared, for I know of old the audacity of this Ket." With which, he summoned his varlets from the kitchen, and the nags having been saddled, the whole party with the addition of Will Lively—who, scenting free quarters and a good cheer, had attached himself to them—were soon riding for Hethersett.

They went at a brisk trot through the town, giving a wide berth to those groups of sots and swilbowls who were quarrelling about the streets; and after an hour or so's riding left the highway, turning along a bye road, when they presently came to an enclosured park, fenced in trimly with pales and newly-planted hedgerows. A pair of handsome iron gates, wrought in a cunning fashion, shewed the entrance to the demesne. These Flowerdew unlocked, and admitted the party into the park,

whence the Manor House was soon seen in the clear moonlight, lying on a slope before them. On a nearer approach it was found to be built quadrangular, in the half-timbered style known as post-and-pan, many a gable with spike-pointed finial peeping up in picturesque grouping. In the centre of the front was a porch, supported on dark oak columns, the capitals of which were carved grotesquely with flowers and animals' heads intertwined. On either side stretched the main building, broken up by large, many-mullioned, bay windows carried up to the second story, where their slanting roofs merged in the chief roof of the house. All along, and around, the faces of the building were laced with diagonal and segmental patterns, formed by the timber quarterings, the interstices being filled in with white plaster, in pleasing contrast to the dark oak. The steep

tiled roofs were relieved in places by small dormers, and big chimney stacks, built lozenge wise, with many a projecting angle, reared themselves gaunt against the sky line, casting deep shadows aslant them. The rear of the quadrangle was occupied by the stabling and out-buildings; whither they rode straight and dismounted.

Flowerdew, consigning Will Lively to the care of one of his attendants with orders to see him snugly housed and victualled, conducted his guest across the courtyard into the house, which was wrapped in quiet, the inmates being all abed, except Jenny Truelove, the housekeeper, who, roused from a nap, came out of her parlour, candle in hand, and received the Master with a respectful curtsey. Flowerdew bade her promptly prepare a guest chamber for his companion, and, while she bustled about to perform his order, the pair paid due

attention to their creature comforts. By when they had finished this agreeable task the bedchamber was ready, to which Flowerdew ushered his guest; and, giving him good night, himself retired to seek the repose which would be found especially grateful after the excitement of the day.

The sun was up and shining bright through his window in the morning before De Burgh rose from his comfortable bed; and, when he descended to the breakfast parlour, he found his host with Lively and several servants, their morning meal being despatched, busily engaged furbishing up weapons, of which there was an abundant supply, of one sort and another, about the house.

"Give thee good day, my lord," exclaimed Master Flowerdew, as he entered, "I scarce need ask how you fare after yesterday's racket, for, unless your looks

do much belie you, thou'rt fresh as a lark, and ready to take your revenge when a fitting moment offers."

"Thank ye, Flowerdew," replied De Burgh, "yes, the sound sleep, which thy comfortable bed did coax, hath banished all the ill effects of yesterday's turmoil; save, indeed, the memory of that foul disgrace, for which my very blood doth burn to get a prompt vengeance."

"If your worship will trust to me," whispered Lively in the young noble's ear, as he sat down to his breakfast, "I will show you a sure, ay, and a sweet-spiced revenge. An I mistake not, the pretty May-queen's charms still haunt thee; so—"

"Hush!" replied De Burgh, under his breath, "hush! we will speak together on this matter anon, when none be by to hear us."

The meal ended, they withdrew from the

parlour, Lively showing the road down a long passage and through a side door to the pleasure gardens, which lay round the front and south sides of the house. These were arranged, in the pleasing fashion of the period, with hedges of aged dark-toned yew, contrasting with light-shaded box-trees, which, cut into fantastic, bird-like shapes, dotted the sward. Here, old England's modest spring flowers were displaying their beauties in charming confusion; the bright, vari-tinted, polyanthus and tawny-hued pansy, growing side by side with pale-yellow daffodils and primroses; sweet-scented gillyflowers kissing slender bluebells; and the trailing Provence rose with bursting buds revelling in unfettered freedom. From the garden, which was separated from the park by a sunk fence, there was a fair prospect over intervening country till the steeple of Wind-

ham church could be seen in the clear morning light. Surely such a scene ought rather to raise pure inspirations in the minds of the two loungers, than be the chosen spot for unlicensed plotting! At first they walked in silence, each shy at approaching the subject of his thoughts. Presently De Burgh broke the ice.

"Marry! good Lively, I know not how it is, but that rosy May-queen's coyness hath raised within me such a flutter, that I scarce can bethink me of aught else. 'Twould be a sad shame if so much rustic loveliness were owned by that malapert churl, on whom I propose to revenge me."

"Of a verity, your worship," replied Will, "'tis a poor barndoor cock that will not crow on his own dunghill. He hath had his crow; ay, and struck thee with his spurs; and I can devise no neater recompense than to lure his mate to the game-

bird's yard—I'll wager he'll not show fight, and she'll plume her feathers in her pride."

"By the mass! Will, I avow your ready wit hath hit the right nail o' the head. An I can get speech with the maid, I'll quick try and cozen her of a kiss; but if she be coy, then shall the May-queen learn that De Burgh brooks not baulking."

Thus, screened by the yew hedges, the pair walked up and down the shady walks, weaving a web in which to catch pretty Peggy.

CHAPTER V.

"I see them! I see them! There's Best's son, the tanner of Wingham;

* * * * * * *

And Dick the butcher;

* * * * * * *

And Smith the weaver.

KING HENRY VI.

IT was the hour appointed for the rendezvous on the Green, which yesterday was the scene of the May-play with its attendant turbulence, and the rioters were coming together, by twos and threes, from their various quarters. All were of the lower grades of life. Conspicuous among them were some of those who had been hired in the cause of the Church, and now seized on the opportunity afforded them by Ket to

transfer their allegiance, reckoning on free and uncontrolled license.

Here came a fellow, whose ugly visage was stamped with those

> "Two things, which a drunkard doth disclose,
> A crimsoned phiz and a pimpled nose,"

ready for any sword law, looking asquint, and swaggering along, his rapier clanking with every stride, and a pistol peeping forth from his rusty doublet—Joe Box by name—who had earned for himself a questionable reputation; many a helpless traveller having yielded up to him his purse—ay, and it was said his life, too, else, why the letter M branded deep on his left thumb?

Along with him walked his boon companion, Peter Giles, also a spongy fellow, twirling at his moustache, and carrying his highly coloured nose loftily in the air. Many another loose-looking fish, with well-

known swilpots and idle ne'er-do-wells, there was, too, who preferred any hurle to working for honest bread, mixed up with stray peasants and yokels. These were mostly armed only with sticks and cudgels, although some few carried scythe blades fastened to poles, yet, wielded by the stout limbed rustics, would the sticks and cudgels be found pretty dangerous weapons in a hand-to-hand combat. The prentice class, too, was represented; for these were, as of yore, ever ready for any devilment; and those from a distance, freed from restraint, were only too eager to seize on any pretext for further excitement; they, as the rustics, were armed only with hedge stakes, and scratch weapons. Flitting about amongst them all were to be seen women earnestly endeavouring to dissuade their husbands or sweethearts from embarking further in the enterprise; but, to all the persuasive

entreaties, and even sharp scoldings of their good angels, they turned but deaf ears, for the frenzy of passion, and the prospect of gain had taken deep root in their ignorant minds. Then the force of example swayed others, as like a rolling snowball their numbers swelled.

They had not long to await their leader, for he presently came, armed with pike and pistol, marshalling a compact band, all equipped with halberts, bills, or javelins. With him were his brother and the Lord of May, who flourished a hastily-made banner, on which were blazoned the words —"Ket and Reformation." As they approached, those assembled shouted—"Hurrah for Ket! Ket for ever!" and otherwise demonstrated by the force of lungs their approval of his proceedings, little dreaming how great a tyrant they were about to set up.

Ket soon shewed he was not wanting in one quality of a good captain, for he promptly set to work ranging his recruits in some kind of order, and it was astonishing how his domineering manner had its due effect on the rabble, who obediently fell into rank, and stood four abreast instead of in a confused mass. Then Ket, putting himself in the centre, was preparing to address them, when there came bustling up a small company of the town watch, headed by the High Bailiff, Master Busswell, the mercer, who was accompanied by Masters Jakeman and Shortreed, and other of the leading burghers of Windham. With them also walked Parson Whitehead, carrying a Bible in his hand, as a symbol of his profession. The civic train approached with some fuss; and in a tone, which betrayed a conscious sense of his dignity as Bailiff, worshipful Master

Busswell thus addressed his fellow burgher :—

"Wherefore, neighbour, is this unseemly concourse? and why, these armed men? I fear much it be for no good thing ye be all gathered here, so, as becomes my office, I command you, Master Robert Ket, forthwith to yield yourself, and I do promise you shall not be more hardly dealt with than your procedure doth warrant. All ye others, I order to disperse to your dwellings, and remain peaceful subjects of the king."

"Methinks thou'rt out of breath to no purpose, Master Bailiff," returned Ket to the astonished magistrates.

"For shame, Robert Ket, to answer up the Bailiff so!" exclaimed Parson Whitehead, "nay, then do I charge thee, by the duty which thou owest to thine ordained instructor, refrain, while now there be time,

from further violation of the law. Know that these, thy fellow burghers, be firmly and rightly moved to uphold it; and as in bygone times thou hast been a good servant of the Protestant Reformation—receiving a full reward for your service, I trow—I now beseech thee by the reverence due to this Holy Bible, which thou professest to honour—ay, and did keep a copy writ by Master Tyndall to thy peril, when proud Gardiner decreed its burning, or else a forfeit of goods and life—yield a loyal obedience to them, who by God's will he set in authority; as thou wilt have learned, if thou hast read that sacred book aright. Then will we, after the due acknowledgment of thine error, receive thee back to the fold, and try persuade them to overget this backsliding."

"Gramercy! Parson Whitehead," replied Ket, "thou takest too much on thyself,

that presumest to lecture me. Dost think that I am to be turned from my bent by thy scolding? Nay, rather, know that I will have none of thy blather, but will pursue my purpose even to the triumphant issue, which awaiteth me. Why should I, forsooth, bow to thee, who some few years agone thyself sold Whitsun ales in Wicklewood churchyard for thine own profit?"

"Then go thy way, saucy man," cried the indignant parson, "and with these poor, misguided fools seek the fate which all godless law breakers surely find."

"Ah! ah!" laughed Ket, "why Master Whitehead, thou'rt as two-faced as the crystal vial of Hales. Now thou cryest up the Church's power; afore none, more loudly than thou, did decry Wolsey and his Pope, and side with Harry, because it so suited thee to get free of them. Thou didst but rob Peter to pay Paul, and now,

belike, thou fearest to get some present loss. Go to, parson, thou'lt get thy tithe pig!"

"Paternoster, hark! how he bewraileth us," exclaimed Whitehead, in a hot fury, "surely the devil hath him fast, as presently will the catch-poll."

"Peace, canter," returned Ket rudely; but his speech was cut short by Master Busswell, whose patience was clean exhausted.

"I'll abear no longer with this paltering —Watch, seize your prisoner."

In obedience to the Bailiff's command, Sergeant Jimes advanced, and placed his hand on the tanner's shoulder, saying,—

"Master Ket, I arrest you in the name of the King."

For reply, Ket briskly struck Jimes's halbert from his hand, and left the sergeant disarmed.

"Now, by my soul! this is past all bearing," shouted the Bailiff, "thus to beard us—Guards! advance, and on your lives secure this audacious brawler, who shall answer for his daring afore the justices."

Thus urged on the posse made a rush at Ket, who called on his followers, and they quickly ran to second him, crying out,—"a Ket, a Ket."

It was but a short struggle, for the civic guards were soon beaten down and mauled, and began to cry mercy lustily; so that the discomfited Bailiff with his constables was glad to beat a retreat, more rapid than dignified.

Ket distributed the arms, which they were deprived of, among the rioters, and stayed the more impetuous of them, who, having tasted the fray, would have liked to pursue their retreating worships, and

wreak some vengeance on them for old scores' account.

"Thus then, my fellows, I promise ye, we'll serve all the bloated offspring of power, whether they be of high degree, or but of middle rank, an they yield not our demands. But now, let's on for Hethersett, where Master Flowerdew awaits us."

With which, Ket, placing himself at their head, marched off eager for revenge on his old opponent.

As they went the rioters passed the little hamlet of Downham, where stood yeoman Goodeve's farm house. In front of it lay a pleasant garden filled with flowers, pot-herbs and vegetables, with a fair sprinkling of apple trees and gooseberry bushes. A well-stocked foldyard, and a herd of milch cows browsing on the yellow pastures round the house, with the contented grunt-

ing of swine, and cackling of hens, told that the farmer was prosperously off.

Several little cots for his peasantry were nestled alongside the road, which was near to the homestead.

The farmer, with his wife and daughter, watched them pass from the large bayed window of the spacious kitchen ; which, well hung with stores of bacon, bunches of sweet herbs—both for medicinal purposes and for strewing the chambers—looked, with its clean sanded floor, homelike and cozy. In one corner stood the distaff, where from home-grown flax the women spun their household linen a nights, while the master busied himself in fashioning gear and yokes for his oxen team. On a dresser lay wooden trenchers with spoons for the pottage ; and pewter dishes and mugs shone brightly ranged along the wall.

Peggy, now looking a sweeter and fairer

daughter of England, in her work-a-day dress, than even in her gay May-day finery, stopped awhile the performance of her domestic duties to gaze with astonishment on the long line of Ket's men.

"I tell thee what, wife," exclaimed Goodeve, "I much mistrust this Master Ket of Windham. I fear he hath beguiled our Will Dickson into his ways, for I'll swear I've just seen him go along walking nigh to Ket. Ah! naught but evil can befall him, if he follow such a lead."

"But thou'lt surely say, father," said Peggy, "that Will's a brave lad, and an honest, who will not let his sweetheart be put on by any."

"In sooth, wench, I'll own the gallant was properly served by Will; ay, and pluckily too, which deed all just men will deem fair; but with yon riotous wastrils, who seek to live without labour, and to eat

without sweat the bread of ease, I hold not one whit. May be, 'tis the tanner's ale hath turned poor Will's brain for him thus to join hands with one who sets our good laws at scorn. Marry! if he mend not his ways, you and he shall soon part, Peggy."

"You're right, John," said dame Margery, "why, I could scarce trust mine own eyes when I saw the folks pass by the paddock, and Will with them a marching along. Ah, me! he's but a sad fool to lend himself to work that troublous burgher's ends."

"It were better far," answered Goodeve, "he minded his plough and got the leasows seeded, else, I'll warrant, there'll be never a bite for his muttons come winter time."

"Pr'ythee, father," said Peggy, into whose blue eyes the tears were welling, "be thou not so harsh towards him."

"Tut, tut, wench, thou'rt but as very a

daff as Will; an thou thinkest he will advantage him in this matter. I tell thee this riot will but land him in Norwich jail. What! dost think Master Flowerdew and his sort will abrook this Ket's sauce, which hath of late been more and more provoking? Nay, I know our gentles better; ay, and am with them hand and glove in this quarrel. I bid thee tell this Will of thine that my wench shall never pair with a skimble scamble fellow, who follows in the tail of yon spouting burgher, and flouts his betters while his sull stands still. A young man should be modest."

The honest farmer spoke with much energy and warmth, but failed to convince Peggy, who answered him—

"Nay but, father, bethink thee that on last St. Valentine's, when the birds do choose their mates, how I looked out a-doors, and the first soul I met was Will a

singing as he went to plough. Thou well wottest, that so 'twas willed by Heaven, for him and me ever after to keep true."

This was a skilful move of Peggy's, for it brought her mother round to her side.

"Come, goodman, you must own Will's a lad of spirit; may be when this fit be past he will return a wiser man, sobered down to work; so be not too hard on him. Now, Peggy girl, hie thee to the churning, the butter must be got for to-morrow's market. Let's hope no further plague will come of it."

"I tell thee, dame, that as he breweth, so must he drink," was the parting shot fired by Goodeve, as Peggy retired pouting to the dairy, shewing for the first time symptoms of resistance to the paternal control.

Then the farmer went forth to his lands,

where the oxen were lazily drawing the plough over his top furlong piece.

The neglect of this duty on Will Dickson's part had seemingly added to his wrath, for he muttered grumblingly to himself as he went along—

"To lose such a day for sull as this—I'd stake my best cow, Poppet, against a sucking calf he'll come to a bad ending. No, no, I'll trust my wench to none such as he."

CHAPTER VI.

"Take thy lute, wench ; my soul grows sad with troubles ;
Sing, and disperse them, if thou canst—leave working."
KING HENRY VIII.

A YOUNG girl sat in an oak-panelled parlour of Thorpe Hall. The room was furnished with comfort, the floor having a carpet of sweet dry rushes. On the hearth was a firepan, with hand-irons, fire-fork, and tongs, ranged on either side of it. Over the carved chimney-place hung a burnished steel mirror, bordered with yellow velvet. The table was inlaid with a pattern of polished cypress and fir woods ; on it stood an ebony standish with silver mountings for ink, and for dust to dry the writing. Before the

windows and door were hangings of arras, worked by some industrious ancestress long since gone to rest. The panels on the walls were relieved by portraits of knights and their dames, to some of whom the girl's features had a strong likeness.

As she sat in a quaint, high-backed chair, her deft fingers were busily engaged embroidering a Scriptural scene on coarse canvas with threads of many-coloured silks, the skeins of which hung round her neck—an apparently interminable task, but one prevalent with ladies then-a-days.

At her feet lay a handsome hound, which looked up now and again into its mistress's face with the anxious gaze of an attached follower, as though detecting in her mien some sorrow or trouble.

By the window another girl was seated on a low stool diligently reading; apparently

half companion, half attendant. She was a pleasant, blue-eyed, maiden of altogether a bolder type of beauty ; for her hands were larger made, her figure plumper, and her cheeks browner than those of her fair mistress, whose complexion was clear and pale, and features delicately cast, while her eyes were dark and lustrous.

The dying rays of the evening sun, falling slantwise through the narrow window, showed that the lady boasted good blood, and rare beauty, two of fortune's gifts, which have ever been rightly prized.

The richness of her dress helped to set off her person to advantage. A gown of flowered damask, cut square at the neck and left open to the waist, disclosed the kirtle of plainer stuff beneath. The sleeves were puffed, and pinched with rich broidery work, and a fair, white lawn partlet, knit with Venice gold, covered her neck. Her hair

was mostly hidden beneath a caul of black velvet, from which had however escaped a a raven tress, which fell naturally on her shoulder.

The companion was neatly dressed in a petticoat of murrey coloured stuff, with a white kercher over her head, and linen sleeves confined at the wrist by a silk band. She also wore a large snowy linen apron.

Such then, were Mistress Catherine Haselwode, the orphan daughter of Sir Denys Haselwode—reckoned the fairest, as well as the greatest heiress in those parts —and her companion, Dorothy Luttrell, whose father, a bold rebel captain, had met his fate in the Pilgrimage of Grace, leaving Dorothy portionless to the bounty of his patron, Sir Denys, who did not long survive his follower.

Being fervently attached to the unreformed Church, the Mistress of Thorpe, as

her father had also been, was in high disfavour with the dominant party.

From the days of young Flowerdew's manhood Catherine Haselwode had been betrothed to him, and the time fixed for their nuptials was now not far distant.

Presently, the lady with a weary sigh laid aside her work, and addressed her companion :—

"In sooth, Dorothy, my heart is well nigh sickened, as I think on these troublous times; when rude and ignorant men tear adown our holy shrines, and trample under foot our precious relics. Ay, and drive the saintly sisters forth from their retreats to fare as they may. Alack! since the great Cardinal's fall, these evils have come on apace."

"And yet, dear Mistress," replied Dorothy, "there be still among us some

brave hearts, who shrink not from venturing them in Heaven's own cause—'Tis surely time the good father's messenger were here with news, since he promised thee speedy word how he prospered at Windham, and he seemed in mighty great spirits about it, too."

"Welaway!" said Catherine, "I fear me some mischance hath fallen out, else had he been here. Dorothy, I've daily waited some great sorrow, since last Christmas Eve, when the yule log—and, thou mayest remember, 'twas a mighty large one, burnt but part the night, and afore morning clean went out. 'Twas an augur of ill to our house. Ah! little did I think, when 'twas drawn in by the gay company, with my Lord of Misrule sitting atop, and we clapped our hands and cried with very laughter at their antics, that it presaged a mournful face on

the morrow—Go now, fetch me my virginal and pricksong, I'll try banish these sad thoughts awhile."

Dorothy, rising at her mistress's bidding, brought the virginal; and Catherine, touching the strings, soon filled the room with tuneful melody, for, as she played and sang, the fair musician seemed to pour all her soul into the work, and, forgetting her painful musings, to kindle in her bosom more enlivening emotions.

The pastime was interrupted by the entrance of a serving man, on whose doublet sleeve was woven the Haselwode badge—a sprig of hazel. He announced the arrival of one, craving instant speech; and was closely followed by him, whom Catherine at once knew for the priest, in spite of the long cloak and muffler, which hid his figure and features. She could

hardly wait until the servant had retired, ere she began to question him how his errand had sped.

"Alas! daughter," replied he, whom we have seen the guiding spirit of the May-plot, "I am but the messenger of our failure. 'Tis a long tale to tell chapter and verse, but I'll try and give the kernel of it. Listen—Hubert de Burgh, by wanton folly, caused our discomfiture on the threshold of success; when he must needs go try some lovepasses with the May Queen, afore the very eyes of her lord. Then up got Ket, the Windham Tanner, and spirited the folks, who took a vengeance on the gay youth, which he'll not quick forget. 'Twas then, Master Flowerdew tried to retrieve us, hoping to get the advantage of his old foe; but the churls were led captive by the vapourings of the Tanner, and elected to follow him in a raid against their betters,

rather than to adventure them for the Church of God."

"Thine is in sooth poor news, father," answered Catherine. "'Tis strange, I was but just telling Dorothy how methought a fit of sadness boded some evil chance—this is a proof that coming sorrow doth cast its shade before it."

"Be not downcast, daughter," said Sykes, "but let us meet trouble with a bold face. Pr'ythee now, let me advise thee; it would be well to take time by the forelock, and call together the varlets of thy manor; none can tell to what deeds these fever-heated Ket's men may pass, so 'tis best to be ready."

"What! thinkest then these churls will dare pit them against us? By our Ladye!" exclaimed Catherine, with flashing eye, "they shall meet with a wholesome welcome! I'll see to this forthwith, and speak

to Captain Daffrow; so farewell awhile, father, you will find the hiding chamber ready prepared.—Come, Dorothy."

Leaving the parlour, Mistress Haselwode and her companion turned along a broad corridor, off which were built the principal sleeping chambers of the Hall, and descending the wide oaken stairs, the balustrade of which was richly, though grotesquely, carved, entered the great hall. This was a long and lofty, yet somewhat narrow, apartment, lighted on one side only by a row of tall mullioned windows, the pointed heads of which were arched after the depressed style of Henry the Seventh's time, when Catherine's grandsire, Sir Giles Haselwode, had made alterations to his house. These windows were filled in with small quarries, except at the heads, where each mullioned space terminated in a cusped trefoil, in the centre of which

were painted on the glass the armorial bearings of the Haselwodes, each one varied by the quartering of some family alliance. The bare stone walls were hung all round with helmets, corslets, casques, javelins, arquebuses, axes, and other weapons, sufficient to arm a moderate force. Down in the vaults beneath, too, there was no lack of powder. The ceiling was of oak, sub-divided into many lozenge-shaped panels, in the centre of each of which was displayed the Tudor rose, or some device of bird or animal. At either end of the hall doors opened, leading to the several parts of the house.

Here they found Captain Daffrow, whose titular captaincy had been acquired by his service in the Pilgrimage of Grace, where he led a troop—wearing on his sleeve the emblem of the five wounds, and following the banner of the picture of Christ—and

had been granted to him by the rebel leader, in recognition of his valour, prior to the collapse of the cause.

Daffrow was a weather-stained, broad-chested, stalwart soldier, past fifty; on whom hard living, adventure, and exposure to all weathers, had only had the effect of ironing his muscles, and greying his beard.

When Mistress Haselwode entered, the soldier, who was busily engaged in polishing the barrel of an arquebus, which he had just reached down from the wall, rose, and clumsily performed his obeisance, while he cast on Dorothy a look, which would lead one to suppose that lively maid had been practising her art of captivation on the man of war, and that some love passes had gone between them, for she blushed slightly at his covert attention. Catherine observing them, jestingly remarked—

"'Tis said, Dorothy, that an amorous old man is like a winter flower; but, methinks, good Daffrow is younger at heart than his frosted beard would warrant."

She quickly relapsed, however, into her former mood, as she told the Captain in a few words the news brought by Sykes, and bade him take prompt action to make a sure defence, if needs were.

"Fear not, mistress," replied Daffrow, briskly, "but I will acquit me of thy trust to the best of my power; I love the game too well. By the mass! if they show their faces here, they shall find it a tough job to get in. I'll forthwith send your command, and call the men together, and betake me to the gates to see how a careful disposition can best be made."

With which, the Captain departed in zealous haste to perform his lady's orders, and was soon occupied in the congenial task

of summoning the retainers, distributing arms, and assigning their various posts; and great was the bustle all over the hall.

"Dorothy," said Mistress Haselwode, as they returned to her parlour, "I cannot rid me of this melancholy fit; even now I am troubled lest mischief befall the reverend prior. My thoughts persist in dwelling on the doleful sight I once witnessed with my loved father. 'Twas on the 22nd day of May, some seven years gone, when I was yet a girl, that Sir Denys took me along with him on a journey to London, whither he went on some secret errand. There we lodged in Cheap the night, and on the morrow, bidding me get on my hood, he led me by the hand to a part called Smithfelde. Here I saw gathered a large crowd of folk, and there were set up three scaffolds, on one of which was seated, in all the civic state, my Lord Mayor with their worships the Alder-

men; and, on either side, my Lord Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk. Before them, on a second, was standing some one making a preachment. On the third stood another whom I remembered having heard awhile before saying mass, and preaching at Paul's Cross, counselling all men not to yield the King supreme over Holy Church. My father whispered me, 'twas Doctor Forrest, of the Grey Friars, of Greenwich. By him was set a picture, sent from Wales, called "Darvell Gatheren," and by it a gallows tree. Beneath the tree was writ, in big letters,—

"David Darvell Gatheren,
As saith the Welshmen,
Fetched outlaws out of hell.
Now he is come, with spere and shilde,
In harnes to burn in Smithfelde,
For in Wales he may not dwell.
And Forest the frier,
That obstinate lyer,
That wilfully shall be dead,
In his contumacie,
The Gospell doth deny,
The king to be supreme head."

And, oh! Dorothy, many a one had full faith in the holy image, as the doggrel shewed. But when the Preacher had ended his saying, methought all sense would leave my body, so numbed with fright was I. Lo! some seized the pious friar, and had him to the gallows, hanged alive by the middle with chains, and burned with the picture. Welaway! the memory of that dread sight is again in mine eyes, and I do so tremble lest our good prior should fall into such bloodthirsty hands; for if he did, he would surely meet a short shrive and quick reckoning for his deeds at Windham. Wherefore, it behoveth us to see with care that none—save only trusty Ralph, who brought him in by the postern door—learn the secret of his abiding-place, or that such an one be with us."

"'Tis, in sooth, a doleful tale, dear Mis-

tress," said Dorothy; "yet be comforted, I hear that Master Cranmer hath set his face against all such bloody deeds, and he hath sway with the King. We'll keep Father Sykes hid away in the secret chamber, where, I trow, none will dream of him. Methinks, though, he will now be hankering after supper, for he hath a marvellous fine appetite, and loveth not to be kept a waiting."

"In sooth, we must not forget his supper," said Mistress Haselwode, as taking up a basket, she proceeded to fill it with wine and food from the table, which was laid with a light refection for rere supper. She then opened a small closet door, formed in the panelling at one corner of the room, and touched some concealed spring, when the back of the closet itself shot back, and revealed a narrow passage, into which she went, carefully closing the door

behind her. Guiding herself by the walls down the windings of the passage, which was dark as pitch, and barely two feet wide, she came presently to a small chamber, so low that a tall man could hardly stand upright, and lighted by a mere slit in the walls, out of the massive thickness of which it was contrived. Here sat the late Prior of Bromeholme, having divested himself of his disguise. Father Michael Sykes had, but a few years back, held great power in these parts; for his Priory had waxed fat with the accumulated offerings of many a pious donor. This had been one of the earliest confiscated by the King, and now its broad acres and beeves were distributed among other owners, and the Prior, with his monks, scattered abroad. He was not alone a sufferer; Bishops Gardiner and Bonner, and others of the Romish persuasion, lay in prison; while

Cranmer, great with the King, seemed disposed to uphold and support the Reformers.

Michael Sykes had passed the time since his deposition in busily scheming, with other kindred spirits, to forward the agitation, now being fiercely carried on in various parts of the country, for a restoration of his Church to power.

He was sitting buried in thought, and, so absorbed, that the entrance of Mistress Haselwode was unnoticed by him, till she spoke, and told him of the defensive preparations going on in the Hall, when he roused himself from his reverie, and answered her:—

"Ah! Mistress Catherine, would that there were but a few score more of hearts true as thy departed sire's in this degenerate land, and I should not despair of speedily prevailing against the strength of these heretical usurpers! I've been a think-

ing on this Windham racket, daughter, and am assured it bodeth not so ill for us as at first it seemed, for an they strike not for us, yet will they be an engine to batter the Protestants. They'll distract the King's men, who will so be weakened, and impotent to cope with Arundel, when he striketh home. But, if I be told aright—and the news came to me by a sure hand—the time draweth nigh when proud Cranmer shall have a fall. The King, I hear, hath a grievous sickness; and well thou knowest, who keeps the Lady Mary's love and duty. Yes, by the Rood! there's a day of reckoning at hand. Affliction is the wholesome soil of virtue, which yieldeth a rich harvest in God's own season. We suffer but awhile!"

"Truly, father," answered Catherine, "ye of the faith have been hardly used; and, if aught befall the young King, I

make no doubt our pious Lady Mary will restore ye again. Yet, remember the old wives' saying, ''Tis ill looking for dead men's shoes.' But, pr'ythee, now excuse me, I may not longer tarry."

"The Virgin have thee in her holy keeping, daughter," said the priest, as Mistress Catherine bade him good night, and left his chamber; when he turned to his supper basket, and proceeded to make a hearty meal.

CHAPTER VII.

"And you, that love the commons, follow me—
Now show yourselves men ; 'tis for liberty.
We will not leave one lord, one gentleman,—
Spare none, but such as go in clouted shoon."

KING HENRY VI.

WHEN Ket and his followers reached Hethersett, they found Master Flowerdew's gates locked. This was, however, no effectual hinderance to them. At a sign from their leader, the rioters commenced tearing up the paling, which fenced off the park from the roadway, for a considerable circuit on each side of the gates; and very soon many a perch of it was levelled to the ground. The work of destruction was at its height, when Flowerdew, with whom rode De

Burgh, came rapidly up to the spot, accompanied by such servants and retainers as he had been able to get together. Astonished at the great number of his opponents, and the determination expressed by their acts, he tried them with soft words, but without avail, for Ket set up a loud jeer.

"Aha! dost think to turn us by sugary speech? I'd ha' credited thee with more brains. Begone! else we'll souse thee in thine own mere, as we did yon dainty duckling. Comrades! mind him not, he'll but bamfoozle ye, let us to work." And seizing hold on one of the posts, he wrenched it up, when a length of the paling fell with a loud crash.

"Take that for thy pains," cried Flowerdew, in a hot passion as, drawing a pistol from his belt, he took an aim at Ket; but somehow the bullet missed its billet,

so he dashed the weapon at his adversary's head, and drawing his sword, rushed full tilt on the rioters, his handful of men bravely seconding him.

In the hand-to-hand fight which ensued, De Burgh singled out Will Dickson, and endeavoured to take his revenge on him, but stout Will—albeit not accustomed to the use of his weapon, which was Serjeant Jimes' own halbert—managed to ward off his thrusts, till the baffled gallant, barely able to keep his saddle from the plunging of the horse—frightened and hurt by the blows showered on its flanks by the yokels' cudgels—was forced in self-defence to back out.

Flowerdew, seeing that his men were being severely punished—although not a few of Ket's had fought their first and last fight, and others were sadly hurt—called on those, who could, to follow

him, and gallopped off to the house; leaving, perforce, several in the hands of his enemy.

Their retreat was hailed with derisive cheers, while Ket, waving aloft his pike—now, alas! bloodstained—encouraged his men:—

"To the house, comrades, to the house! our work hath begun well!"

So they started briskly in pursuit towards the manor, where by this, Flowerdew, with the remnant of his followers, now reduced to twenty, had arrived, and was holding a hurried consultation with them how best to keep the house against their assailants.

It was soon resolved that the doors should be made fast, and all the lower windows blocked, while the men were distributed at the upper windows, and other posts of vantage about the building,

where they would be best able to repel any attack.

Their preparations were scarce completed before Ket and his people came in sight, and proceeded to spread themselves round the house.

Ket directed the operations not unskilfully, for he first made his men keep under cover of the trees round about, while he carefully surveyed the place on all sides. Then he told off a detachment to a wood-pile hard by, ordering them to knock up some rough ladders, with a view to effect an entrance by the upper windows of the back, while a general attempt was made on the front.

All this while the little garrison were not idle, but fired on the besiegers from their posts within; and many a rash churl and prentice lad bit the dust. The fate of their fellows did not, however, daunt the rest,

who returned the fire whenever opportunity offered, making havoc with the window glass.

Night now drew on, and Ket determined to make his effort, hoping, by a combined attack on several sides, to get a foothold within the place.

In pursuance of this plan he divided his men into four parties, naming a lieutenant to each, and at a given signal sent them to the assault on three sides, so as to compel the defenders to draw to the defence of those quarters.

As the conflict waxed warm, Ket himself led his picked lot round to the back of the house, and, unnoticed in the din which was going on in front, stealthily reared a ladder to the upper window of a sleeping room.

The captain himself first mounted, and easily forced an entrance, and was followed by the others, one by one; when, silently

making their way down a narrow stair, they found their way into the front part, rushing in and taking the garrison in the rear, just as his men, who had been partly screened from the fire of those inside by the projection of the upper story over the lower, broke in the chief door, and were pouring into the hall.

Here Flowerdew with a handful of men was trying to oppose their entrance, when he was pounced on behind, and his disheartened followers, seeing their master a prisoner, and themselves taken front and rear, laid down their arms.

De Burgh and Lively, hearing the riot in the hall, came from their posts, and looking over the staircase, saw the place in the hands of Ket's men, and Flowerdew himself a prisoner, so they concluded it wise to take care of themselves. Accordingly, they crept round to the back as

quick as they could, and, slipping out of an outhouse door, struck across country, unchallenged and unobserved.

The dining-hall of the Flowerdews now presented an unaccustomed appearance, crowded as it was with the victorious rioters, while in one corner stood the humiliated master, eying his rough and unwelcome visitors. From the walls portraits of bygone Flowerdews — stern soldier, stately dame, coquettish beauty, and solemn-visaged priest—looked down, reproachfully and disdainfully, on the intruders. Ket, leaning on a pike, gazed on his prisoner with exultant glee, not unlike a hawk about to strike his quarry.

"So, so," said he, "Master Andrew Flowerdew! Squire of Hethersett! Lord of its fair manor! Every dog hath his day; yesterday your bark was heard, now you feel my bite—and, i'faith, I'll make all your

quality feel it, too! Ha! ha!" laughed he, "the great Master Andrew Flowerdew, Esquire, and his varlets, beat by the burgher tanner and his poor followers! 'Tis a pretty sight to see!"

His prisoner, surveying Ket contemptuously, disdained to answer him; but not so Jenny Truelove, who, with the other females, had been brought into the hall. She was quite unable to restrain her passion on seeing the indignity put on her master, and cried—

"Marry come up! a pretty fellow you be to crow! Know none but a startup would thus becall his betters, hold thy ribald tongue, man!"

"Hoity toity! my fat, perky, dame," answered Ket, "an thou wast not past thy prime, I'd quick kiss those lips of thine; but now I keep my kisses for other redder lips, and rosier cheeks. Beware though

thou keepest a better curb on that refractory tongue of thine, else will I not restrain my more eager comrades, who even now do burn, seeking some reward for their valour, and mayhap will not scorn such an one as thou! Come! do you and your wenches just set out some supper, we are hungry, and hardset with fasting since the morn—methinks, my men, we've earned our supper—so, see thou quickly to our creature comforts. Come! art surd, dame?"

But Jenny Truelove, her honest brown eyes flashing, did not budge, as she replied:—

"And is it for Robert Ket of Windham to order me, forsooth, whose own grandsire was himself of the company of Merchant Adventurers? Get thy supper how thou canst, fellow!"

Flowerdew, now, wisely interfered.

"Peace! good Jenny, 'twere better for us his will were done peaceably; so take the wenches, and see what victual there is in the buttery. Here be the cellar keys, let them have their fill, else will they take it."

Jenny Truelove departed, bridling with wrath, as Ket fired a parting shot at her.

"I'faith, there goes a scold enough for the cucking stool!"

Meanwhile, bands of the rioters wandered unlet over the house, and, incited by the example of Joe Box and Giles, ransacked the place from top to bottom, breaking open cupboards and closets, and helping themselves freely to any articles that took their fancy, quarrelling one with another for possession.

Flowerdew, with his arms bound to his sides, watched with impotent rage the appropriation of his household gods by these light-fingered gentry.

When the women had set out the victuals, the work of revelry and feasting began in earnest, and the choice sack, as well as the nut-brown ale, with which the manor cellars were well stocked, were freely indulged in by the hot and thirsty Ketites.

Jenny Truelove and her wenches took advantage of the opportunity afforded them by the feasting of the rioters, who had omitted to set any guard at the doors, to slip out; and, hurriedly as she could, the plump housekeeper made across for Yeoman Goodeve's, where she arrived when the good folks were all abed. Her cries for admission, and the barking of the house dog, aroused the slumbering inmates, when the farmer promptly descended and gave admittance to the agitated women, who commenced pouring forth their tale of woe into his sympathising ears.

"Alack! Alack!" cried Jenny, "that I should have lived to see this day! Woe is me! Yeoman Goodeve, that knave, Robert Ket of Windham, hath dared to say he'd kiss me, an I had not passed my prime—I, who am scarce turned forty years, and he—a red-nosed, stomachous fellow. Faugh! I am quite a sick. Ay, and your Will Dickson, too, is along with him, as brazen-faced as any, egging on the others—and they've tied the Master's arms, and are making a sad racket up at the manor. Oh! dear, dear!"

Here she was so overcome, that a burst of tears ensued, in which the other wenches followed suit.

The kindly farmer and his wife tried to console them as best they could.

"Ha! sayest so, Jenny? Well now, I told my Meg but this very day at dinner time, when we saw them troop past, I

befeared young Will would come to bad, and forbade our Peggy holding further speech of such a rapscallion. I've always stood up for Church and quality, as my forbears did afore me. Honour, where honour is due, say I, none of your brawling Kets for me. But come, cheer up, thy master will soon be rescued, I'll warrant!"

With such like honest talk did Goodeve sooth the agitated Jenny and her wenches, who had also found their tongues, till the time that the sleeping-rooms were ready, when the housekeeper with her fluttering covey, betook themselves and their lamentations to roost, but hardly to slumber. Meanwhile, Ket, with two or three others of the chiefest among them, had made a close inspection of the house, and found sundry underground vaults on the eastern side, such as it was common to find in all mansions at that time, and available either

for storage of powder and arms, or even a prison.

They were built of massive stone, and had formerly been a part of the basement of an ancient tower, on the site of which the manor house was built. Into one of these gloomy vaults, lighted only by a small slit in the wall, through which the air freely passed, and the light faintly struggled, was the indignant master dragged; and, some straw being thrown in to form a shake-down, the key was turned on him, and he was left to his meditations.

From the propinquity of a small mere, the walls, in spite of their thickness, were damp; and the discomfort of the place did not conduce to his serenity of mind, racked, as it was, with rage that the tanner had got the upper hand of him, and vexation at the humiliating figure he would cut in the eyes of the high-spirited

girl, to whom he was betrothed, as well as before all the neighbouring gentry. Here, however, we must leave him to fret for a time.

Every day added to the numbers of those who had thrown in their lot with Ket; and while Flowerdew lay imprisoned in his own house, the rioters were clovered there, using his property without scruple, guzzling his drink, slaughtering his cattle and sheep, and stalking his bucks; for there were now many mouths to feed.

With swelling pride Ket saw his numbers grow larger and larger, and ambitious visions turned his brain, as he began to assume a more decided authority.

They had no lack of present employment, for he divided them into various bands, and appointed to each one of his picked friends as a lieutenant or overseer. These bands he sent out, right

and left, to devastate the district, and right heartily did they take to their job, the hedges and fences, planted with care by Flowerdew and his predecessors, being soon thrown down and torn up, while the park was laid an open waste.

Day by day Captain Ket watched the proceedings of his willing tools with unconcealed pleasure, as they went from one outrageous act to another, till he persuaded himself the time had come to make them a stepping stone for his own ambition. Accordingly he determined to strike the iron while it was hot, and called them round him in front of the house, where, from an upper window, he boldly unfolded his views.

"Comrades! ours is a task but new begun, yet, having put our hands to the plough, must we not look back, else shall we be apperilled by speedy ruin. Ye see

how Fortune, which ever sticketh to the bold, hath so far smiled on our endeavours. This man, our oppressor, already cast down; and ye, who have some of you borne his yoke, revelling in his stead. Will ye, then, now turn back? I trow not. Rather, let your Captain lead you on to greater deeds than this; and, with the hoarded riches of these gentle folks and feudal lords, make you all rich as they, who in turn shall be your varlets. Comrades! never more need ye work, if ye but prove yourselves men, and show your pluck. Who is there can withstand us? 'Tis said, the king's men can not even face the Devonshire rebels—and they be but Papish scum—so they be not like to prevail against us. Why should we be content with so small a meed of Reform, that the Church only should be handled, while the rich get off scot

free? Say I, reform them all, lords and gentry; ay, and traders and yeomen, too! I, Robert Ket, will lead ye on to help yourselves to their fat possessions. But first must we enrol, and train us in a soldier-like fashion; then, shall we beat any that may venture against us. Wherefore, I do propose all true men yield them to my command. I'll bear with no laggards, and all coistrils can even now be gone. They, who be not with us heart and soul in this quarrel, were best without. And, hark ye! I swear to visit all traitors and carry-tales with speedy punishment."

Ket's specious words were caught at by the ignorant beer-flushed rabble, and scarce a man left him, so that a large muster were soon enrolled, and divided into companies, each with a lieutenant.

The Manor, like every other gentleman's house, had contained a fair stock of

arms of various kinds, and these Ket distributed among them, organising expeditions to the neighbouring gentry's houses for procuring an additional supply of weapons. Thus he set the ball a rolling.

CHAPTER VIII.

"His soul, like bark with rudder lost,
On passion's changeful tide was tost;
Nor Vice nor Virtue had the power
Beyond the impression of the hour;
And O! when passion rules, how rare
The hours that fall to Virtue's share!"

ROKEBY.

THE moon was feebly struggling to assert herself against the black clouds, which kept passing before her disk, veiling her pale face now and again; till, in the contest, the clouds prevailed, so that the prospect was soon wrapped in the sable garments of darkness. It was a stormy night; the high wind rushed impetuously through the tops of the trees, forcing them to bow their lofty heads, and dashing

off their maimed limbs with fierce violence to the ground, while the rain blew with blinding force into the faces of the two pedestrians, who were making their way across country from Hethersett, towards Thorpe.

"By the mass!" said one of them, breaking a long silence, "I would this journey were done, and Thorpe in view; 'tis an unkid night to be abroad. I'd rather be a sucking Master Flowerdew's March ale than bound on this errand; and so, too, would you, Will, an I mistake not!"

"I'faith, that would I, noble sir," answered Lively, for he and De Burgh were the two companions. "A plague take the knaves! Yet, even this is better than to have shared Master Andrew's state. By cock and pye! this Ket hath some pluck to face what many a stout heart

would shrink from; 'twill now be war to the knife 'twixt him with his scurvy bands, and all the strength of the gentle folk and sobersided traders. 'Tis strange how things turn out. Why! now I come to think on't, 'tis but some six years agone last Allhallows Eve, when I was staying out at Wattlefield, sithen I was made King of the Bean—and a right merry crew did I get together. We dressed us all in green doublets and russet slops, with ribbons and laces, which the wenches lent us, I'll warrant you, sir; and, with the bells a jingling about our legs, we footed it along. First the Boar's head, then the music blowers, then some as hobby horses, others as dragons; so we marched to Church, which was all decked with holly boughs. The folks looked out a window as we went, and none did laugh louder—ay, or give us better huffcap and cakes, than did Bob

Ket in return for my Lord of Misrule's badge of rhyme. Ah! we had a right gay time on't, for we piped and danced, gilliard and pavo, in the great Tithe Barn the livelong night. I'd be glad to see the like again "——

"Come! come! Will, a truce to thy memory's fancies," interrupted De Burgh, "Can not thy wit discern I am burning to discuss other matter with thee? Let us try devise some plan, by which this coy May-queen may be coaxed to give me speech:—I swear by my barony, she hath so enslaved me, that 'twill go hard but I compass mine end—De Burgh hath not often wooed in vain—what d'ye say? Shall I make you my henchman, and take you into service with pay proportionate? Thou'lt find it a merrier game than play-acting, man."

"Now beshrew me for a rank greenhorn,

an I close not hands on the compact," cried Lively, "we must first put coin in our pouches, and virtue may follow as best it can. I pray your lordship to command poor Will's service forthwith—old dogs are staunch hunters !"

"Marry ! then so let it be," said De Burgh, "and though we must first seek succour for our benighted friend, Andrew, mayhap, this other matter will dovetail with it."

In such like talk they held forth, and beguiled the time till day dawned, by when Thorpe Hall was reached, which, as it stood looming in the grey light, looked, as it was, the fitting home of some feudal lord.

Built of stone and flint, three stories high, it had at each angle a high loop-holed turret, and was encircled by embattled walls, with a deep moat running

before them, crossed by a bridge, now high-drawn, to the guard-house, where a portcullis barred the way.

In reply to the challenge of the look-out man, De Burgh announced his style and errand, when the bridge was lowered, and the young noble ushered into the guard-room, where he found Captain Daffrow, to whom he narrated the doings at Hethersett, and depicted the unfortunate position of its master. Nor did he forget to tell the numbers of his foes.

The Captain, sniffing the fray from afar, bustled off to summon Dorothy, whom he bade rouse her lady, and communicate to her the arrival of the Lord De Burgh, and Master Flowerdew's sad plight.

Ere a long while had elapsed Mistress Catherine appeared, attended by Dorothy, and to her De Burgh advanced with a gallant air. Bending his knee he attempted,

after the fashion of the time, to kiss her hand, which, however, the Lady of Thorpe withheld, and exclaimed—

"What! and art a true knight to leave thy friend in misfortune, and seek a feeble woman's aid? You, too, who first didst rouse their just ire, and then fled from the churls. Fy on thee! De Burgh, rather had I heard thee dead, than that one of thy noble blood should thus demean his order."

"Nay, sweet mistress," answered the noble, flushing with choler, "rebuke me, an thou wilt, for a moment's folly, since I perceive some tell-tale hath whispered thee of mine indiscretion at Windham Fair; still, I pr'ythee, spare mine honour reproach, for—as my comrade here will avouch—I stayed and fought by Flowerdew's side till all was lost; and then—wotting the bond 'twixt thee and him—I

did what a true knight should, when I escaped their clutches, trusting to raise some speedy succour, and by the aid of thy men at arms to rescue him, and give Ket's rabble a sound drubbing."

"Well, my lord," said Catherine, whose mantling cheeks betrayed that De Burgh's sly shaft had struck home, "of all this I know naught, save thy own report; but, from our Reverend Father Sykes' own lips, I learned that our plans, so well matured, were marred by thy folly at Windham Fair, where thou didst act a very Lord of Mis-rule. Yet, God forbid! that I, woman as I be, should judge thee, or press too hard upon thee. We'll e'en try and repair the mischief done; thou shalt have a fair chance of retrieving thy soiled fame, and teaching these audacious churls to respect us—Daffrow," continued she, turning to her Captain, "let a troop of picked men

ride for Hethersett with speed, I make no doubt you'll quick rescue Master Flowerdew from this bold Tanner's clutch—Lord De Burgh, you ride with them, so, I'll bid you farewell, and wish ye all God speed!"

With which the Mistress of Thorpe departed to seek the priest, and tell the unwelcome news, leaving Daffrow to the task of collecting his men, and De Burgh and Lively to their meditations, the former of whom stood apart with a frowning brow, clearly not relishing the lady's abrupt dismissal. When the coast was clear, Lively said—

"Take not the lady's words awry, noble sir, she spake but the blunt truth, albeit unpalatable. Of a verity, 'twas thine amorous eye—and nought else—caused the downfall of her cherished hopes. She is but a churchwoman, whom these priests play shuttlecock with!"

"You're right, Will," replied De Burgh, striving to hide his spleen, while he swore an inward oath of revenge on Dickson, as the prime cause of all the slights put upon him, "the tongue is a woman's sword, which she never suffereth to rust, and I can but allow my jest hath raised a storm which I would fain see quelled. Marry! though, she was too hard on me, because the people sickened of the shaveling's plottings. Well! so let it be—every miller draweth water to his own mill—I'll wash my hands of all these sly priestly schemes, and, henceforth, play my own game in mine own fashion."

There was soon a great fuss about the hall, as the men-at-arms were gathered in the courtyard. Then the captain reviewed his force with military precision, and, leaving sufficient men for the proper defence of the place, started for Hethersett, De Burgh

and Lively riding with the little troop. Mistress Catherine watched from the turret her men ride forth in all their bravery, and her lips breathed a soft prayer to Heaven for their success. Ever since her betrothal she had regarded Flowerdew with a tender affection, and it now hurt her womanly pride to hear that his rashness had, in part, been the cause of his ignominious state, as also, that so paltry an antagonist should have prevailed against him.

The fair girl's anxiety was not, however, destined to be rewarded as it deserved, for the scattered remnant of her troop with the discomfited captain returned by night-fall of the following day from a bootless errand, having found the rioters more than their match, by reason of their far greater numbers. After leaving many of his men on the ground, Daffrow had been forced to draw off the remainder and retire, which he

was enabled to do without pursuit, as Ket's men lacked horses.

Somewhat crestfallen, wounded, and bearing about him marks of the fray, the stern, grey-bearded, soldier ruefully presented himself before his impatient mistress to report the issue of the combat, and meekly withstood her reproachful looks, encouraged by the sympathetic glances which the coquettish Dorothy stole at him.

"What, then!" exclaimed Mistress Catherine, after his tale was told, "couldst thou, too, not prevail over such a mighty foe? Then, trow I, that by none can Master Flowerdew be held a palterer, nor can any smirch his honour. I thought thou couldst have forced this tanner's power, and rescued him with whom, in his fallen state, mine heart doth mourn. Pr'ythee, leave me; I would ponder awhile what 'tis best were done in this our strait."

When he was gone, Catherine Haselwode made her way in haste to the priest's chamber, and imparted her tidings, which were received by him with no little agitation, although his impassable countenance betrayed few signs of the conflicting feelings which were working in his active mind. After some moments of thought, he replied;—

"Daughter, thou well wottest God worketh in many diverse ways his own will, albeit we poor mortals be forbid to see. It may be this Ket will prove a pliant tool in our hands; and, could we devise some course whereby to lure him to the side of Holy Church, we would cast him by as a rotten garment when our ends be served."

"Nay, father," said Catherine, "I should, in sooth, be grieved to see our Holy Church owe its uprising to such a source."

"Tush! daughter," answered Sykes,

"bethink thee; the fall was by the hand of an adulterous king—once, forsooth, so fiery in his zeal for Church that he wrote a defence of the seven Sacraments, and subtly earned the proud title of "Defender of the Faith" from the holy Father, Leo himself.—Besides, thou hast heard that martyred maid, the Nun of Kent, when she lay prostrate afore our Ladye's shrine at Court-a-Street, foresaw a speedy uprising of the Church, but through blood letting. Make no doubt, 'twas of this very Ket she spake. The cause will purify the tools with which we work. Methinks I'll send a message to him—fair words cost naught!"

"Of a verity thou art the better arbiter twixt right and wrong," answered Catherine, "and I must fain yield me to thy wisdom—yet," continued she, hesitatingly, "this course doth run counter to all my sense of honour; nor—forgive me the speech,

father—do I think mine honoured sire, if he were on earth to guide me, would hold with thee in this."

"Mistress Catherine," said Sykes, "thou wast ever taught by thy valiant sire, when he walked with thee in life, that Holy Church can do no wrong; so I, thy spiritual father, do charge thee by St. Faith to yield me prompt and dutiful obedience. Methinks, daughter, it were well now thou shouldst betake thyself to thy stitchery, which, I know, will better suit thee than talk of rude war."

Catherine submitting, but unconvinced, left the subtle Priest to his musings how best to advantage his cause by the present unpropitious turn of events.

After long consideration, he indited a letter, holding out to Ket great offers of future reward, if he would make common cause with the deposed priesthood, and

despatched it to him by a sure messenger, awaiting in impatience for a reply.

A couple of days elapsed, ere the return of his messenger, when Ket's answer was placed in his hands. Breaking the seal he eagerly perused the contents, and, from the frown on his brow, it was soon clear that the response was unpalatable to him. In it, Captain Ket made answer, that being somewhat inclined to listen to his proposals, he demanded as a preliminary condition and as a surety of good faith, that the hand of Mistress Catherine Haselwode should be first pledged to him in wedlock; which done, he would further treat of the matter.

With a malison on the tanner's audacity, Sykes crushed the letter in his hand, muttering, "Now, by the rood! I'm clean amazed--set a beggar on horseback, and he'll ride straight to the devil! I dare not

even tell Mistress Catherine—and yet," pondered he, "if she would but lend herself to lure him on; by our Ladye! she would be a bait to catch a nobler fish than Bob Ket, the Windham tanner!"

CHAPTER IX.

CADE.—"I have thought upon it; it shall be so.
Away burn all the records of the realm; my
Mouth shall be the parliament of England—
And henceforth all things shall be in common."

KING HENRY VI.

A COUPLE of months after Windham fair, there was gathered together under the gnarled branches of one of the stoutest oaks that ever grew on old England's soil, a motley assemblage, part adventurer, part misguided enthusiast, part churl, part riffraff.

Standing on the Hill of Mousehold, but a few miles distant from Norwich city, this famed oak reared its sturdy trunk, and outspread its wide green branches. Now, grouped beneath its shade, were Captain

Ket with his brother, and a little knot of his picked followers. From the spot where they stood, a fine view was obtained of Norwich and the surrounding country; and the leader of the insurgent army—for to these proportions had it by this time arrived—had well chosen the position for his centre of operations.

Round about, the country was dotted with rough tents, and with huts made of withy and osier sticks, the interstices being daubed with mud, and the roofs covered with straw and branches of trees, in which were encamped the hosts, who had enrolled themselves under Ket's banner.

One by one, the houses of the gentry had fallen, despite the stout resistance of their occupants, and now the whole district lay at the rebel leader's feet, whose first success over Flowerdew had so raised him in the minds of the common sort, that they

had unquestioningly yielded submissive obedience to his orders.

Ket—as his brother, who seemed but his echo—was now clad in soldier-like fashion, with corslet and greaves, and wore a plume in his helmet. By him stood Will Dickson and other lieutenants, all armed, though after a somewhat incongruous style. One had a breastplate and helmet; another, a helmet but no breastplate; and some had neither, but were equipped with swords, halberts, pikes, and other odd weapons. The stock of arms, which the sack of Hethersett had afforded them, had since been largely increased by the stores got from the towns and from the other gentlemen's houses in the district, all which, save only Thorpe, had shared the fate of Master Flowerdew's.

The camp was at best but a jarring concord. It was quite beyond the power of the Captain or his lieutenants to exercise

a strict discipline over the miscellaneous host, even if they had understood how to set about the job.

It seemed that the discussion, which was being held under the oak by the conclave, was now over, for Ket said, "As we be all agreed, comrades, let us now to the business of the general weal. Sound the call!" In answer to the loud blast of the trumpeters, the rioters came running up from all quarters towards the oak.

When the motley crowd was gathered round, Ket, by the aid of a rough ladder—clambered up into the tree, and, sitting astride on a thick branch, addressed them.

"Comrades! what is this I hear? that the more greedy of ye have—in diversion of the pact, whereby 'twas agreed to have equal partition of all plunder and pillage—dared to contravene our license, and to enrich yourselves by hiding that which ye

have got, not in fair faith bringing it to the common stock, when we, your Captain and Governors, would ourselves have seen proper division made. Now, harken! as ye wot 'tis opportunity makes a thief, likewise a short reckoning maketh long friends; wherefore, we be minded to have a stricter honour among ye, and now adjudge that all spoil be henceforth brought together, that a true partition may be made. And, further, do decree this tree be styled the 'Reformation Oak,' for here we pledge us to remedy all complaints, and justly to give a fair hearing to all. So then, we do forthwith stablish here Courts of Chancery, of Pleas, and of King's Bench, similarly to those at Westminster. Marry! but free of the long-tongued lawyers—here, each man shall be his own tell-tale, and we, the Governors, will adjudicate. Henceforth let any of ye, who have grievance or complaint

against others, come boldly, and we will take speedy means for the redressing of your wrongs. Yet, remember, that a knave discovered is the greatest fool; so will we send to instant prison,—ay, and if need be to death—any who shall bear false witness, or shall dare to controvert this our will. 'Liberty and Reformation' hath been, and shall ever be, our motto."

"The Captain speaketh aright," chorussed the lieutenants, when Ket's stentorian voice had ceased, and they started a loud cheer, which the multitude took up, and repeated over and over again; till, from hill to hill, over dale and valley, the hoarse murmur of the shouting host was echoed.

There were not wanting, however, those among them to whom Ket's views were highly distasteful; who, although they allowed his leadership, still held themselves

free from all discipline; and of the cheerers, only those about the oak knew the cause for which their voices were exercised.

"Marry! now," whispered Box to his companion cut-purse, Peter Giles, "this is but a government without a government, for who shall judge the governors themselves? The tanner beginneth early to lord it over us—I trow, 'twill soon be well for us to shift our quarters, an he heareth of our secretion of Master Flowerdew's silver cups, and the bonny pearl necklet, which we had from the sacking of Sir Giles Starling's, and other sundry chattels—to say nothing of the broad pieces, which these dolts' pouches have yielded, now and again, to our fingering—'twill go hardish with us."

"Never fear," answered Giles, "none will guess the spot where the swag is stowed. Erget's cave hath ever been

shunned as Satan's haunt. 'Tis said, he walketh there a nights, and spiriteth off any who may venture near. Ha! Ha! Ha! these Canterbury tales make good times for us sly rogues! We be the cats that catch the mice! Why, 'twas I, my very self, first put out that tale, and frightened poor old parson Whitehead by mumming there one summer's eve, dressed in a jackass's skin, when he passed by pondering on a homily for the Sabbath. Ha! Ha! All's well that ends well!"

His companion's loud cackling testified to a due appreciation of Giles's wit; and, as they pursued their way, arm in arm, we may warrant the greenhorn, who next fell in their path, would have to lament the loss of his pouch.

Through the camp, lack of military order and trained discipline was very manifest. Idleness, and debauchery, rather appeared

to be the main attractions for the many. Here, a group of quarrelling varlets drunk from silver cups, Sack and rich Burgundy wines, purloined from out some squire's cellars. Anon, one met others wearing the rich trunk hose and feathered cap of the higher classes, setting all the sumptuary laws at open defiance, strutting about like jackdaws in peacocks' plumes. Nor was there any scarcity of women, mostly of a low grade, flaunting about the encampment, bedizened in the finery of plundered ladies of quality, and aping the manners of their betters. Here, noisy gamblers played span-farthing. There, loud uproarious laughter told that some troller was singing in cracked notes his bawd ditty.

It was plain to see, such a crew would be easy prey to a very inferior number of smart soldiers, when the issue came to be tried.

A picked band of the best of them was now being collected under the superintendence of the Captain himself, whose heart was set on seeing the inside of Thorpe Hall, ay, and who can tell what other motive urged him ? since the loveliness of Mistress Catherine Haselwode, and her betrothal to Master Flowerdew, were the common talk of the countryside.

The attention of the gamblers and loiterers was presently directed into another channel by the appearance of a small cavalcade, slowly, and with dignity, winding its way up the hill.

Leaving their games and songs, all ran and crowded round the procession, which consisted of a Herald, clad in tabard and all the distinctive array of his office, attended by a brace of trumpeters, and half-a-dozen men-at-arms.

Advancing to the front of the Reforma-

tion Oak, the trumpeters blew a shrill fanfare, repeated three times, while the people stood round, agape at the novel sight. Then the Herald read out in a clear voice :—

"Men of Norfolk and of Suffolk, hark ye! I be charged to speak by your most high and natural sovereign, King Edward, who hath been anointed of God to rule you, preserve you, save you from your enemies, and to administer the laws well and rightly every man getting his own and to suppress disordered folks, to correct traitors, thieves, robbers, and such like. Now, know ye, that he hath for love descended from his high majesty to consider you in your simple ignorance, and to send you instruction—like a father to unruly children—who could in justice send you destruction—like a king to wicked rebels. Wherefore, by his command I

make proclaim that every man of ye rebels, traitors, and robbers as ye be who shall lay aside his arms, and quietly and peaceably go home to his dwelling—first freeing them who be in present bondage, and yielding up their plundered chattels—shall get a free pardon, and his misdoings shall be forgot. But if ye will not listen, then I give ye to know, that as ye see his mercy thus abundantly, so if ye further provoke him, he doth swear by the living God, ye shall feel the power of the same God in his sword; which, how mighty it is, no subject knoweth; how puissant it is, no private man can judge; how mortal it is, no Englishman can dare to think! God save the King!"

When the Herald had finished, dead silence reigned for a moment amongst them; but, in the impressiveness of the heraldic ceremony, the gentle language of

the proclamation defeated its own end, and Ket's harsh voice soon broke on the silence in answer:—

"Master Pursuivant! thou hast spoke thy king's message, and now shalt hear the answer of the Reformers from the mouth of their chosen captain. Tell, then, this king of thine, Sir Herald, that we neither need nor desire pardon for aught; and that I, their captain, Robert Ket, have pledged me to reform this land, even as thy king hath been trying to reform the Church. Wherefore, in the name of this great Army of the Reformation, I now bid him defiance. Get thee back, quick, and tell him that we make no account of such manner of mercy; nor be minded to turn our hands back from the plough we have set a-going."

The insurgents loudly endorsed their

Captain's spirited defiance, calling out, "God save Ket!"

Ay, and the more forward of them, but that Ket checked their ardour, had not scrupled to lay hands on the Herald himself, who stood unmoved in the midst of the surging throng, while the bold and ambitious traitor uttered his defiance; then, contemptuously turning away, left, and went unlet through them, to report his mission to the Council sitting up in London.

CHAPTER X.

"Love and meekness, lord,
Become a Churchman better than ambition;
Win straying souls with modesty again,
Cast none away."

KING HENRY VIII.

IN his hiding-chamber at Thorpe sat the dispossessed Prior of Bromeholme. During the time which has intervened since we last saw him there, his circumstances had not brightened, but events had rapidly gone counter to his wishes. Though ignoring Ket's first audacious answer to his overtures, he had, nevertheless, since plied him with bribes and tempting offers of another sort; which, skilfully as they had been administered, had been by that Captain promptly refused.

Now, growing bolder than before, Ket, by a message which lay before him, demanded the surrender of the Hall in terms of insolent command.

Sykes had, in vain, tried all his rhetoric to coax Mistress Catherine Haselwode into lending herself a lure to attract Ket to his service. The fair girl, obedient as she had ever been to his advice in all other things, was not to be stirred on this point from her maiden troth by all the manœuvring priest's cajolery, or sophistry. Indeed, words had passed between them almost to a quarrel; for she had been hard pressed by him, who perhaps thought that his Church's cause could be better served by the rising and now powerful Ket, than by the gentry, since they had of late been everywhere getting the worst end of the stick.

As the priest sat deep in thought,

Catherine presented herself for her morning salutation. After the customary greetings had passed, Sykes, playing somewhat nervously with the letter which lay before him, returned once more to the charge. The task was, however, not a congenial one to him, nor did he find his words come so ready to the tongue as they were wont; and he kept his searching eyes averted from the girl's face. Presently he spoke—

"Daughter, thou wottest we have of late in our talk often marvelled at the quick strides with which this Ket, the Windham Tanner, hath been mounting up the ladder of fame. But a few years agone, when I was fresh at Bromeholme, he was a humble burgher of small account in Windham. After awhile, waxing fat as we declined, he made the first step. Then, did he elect himself Captain leader of this great host, and, subverting our gentles

by force of arms, set his foot on the topmost rung. Now the country folks tell us he is held a very king by them, and hath stablished Courts of Justice, so that all Norfolk and Suffolk acknowledge none other king than Ket. By the Rood! I am persuaded if he would make common cause with Holy Church—to which end I have writ him divers letters—I'd not doubt me of a marvellous triumph. Daughter! thou art, I trow, a true child of Holy Church, and daily readest the Bedes, which tell thee to pray for her weal, it resteth with thee, and with thee alone, whether this rebel king be so seduced as to vantage her. Bethink thee of the mighty work thou art called to do to thine honour. He hankereth to make thee his Queen Ket; so, if thou wouldst but give the presumptuous burgher some encouragement—not i' faith, to turn recreant to thy old love, but to lure him into

the meshes of our plot—then could we use him awhile till our end be served, when he should meet the proper reward of his audacity. All's fair in so good a cause! What sayest thou?"

Mistress Catherine Haselwode's bright eyes sparkled with wrath, as she answered the plotting churchman.

"And dost thus speak to a daughter of Haselwode—to me, the betrothed of another, with whom, in his desolate state, my heart is firmer linked than in days of yore when we took our pleasuring, and shared our griefs together? Never! father, never will Catherine Haselwode, of her own free will, become the weapon for wounding the true heart of another! Methinks, thou hast mistaken me."

"Nay, then, daughter," replied Sykes, mildly, "be not up in arms; thou dost not read the purport of my appeal aright. I

would fain persuade thee the course I shadowed out will be approved even by Master Flowerdew himself; ay, and, if thou'lt but say the word, I'll promise to secure his yea—'Twould in truth be a hard trial for him to watch the game; yet, methinks, a good son of Holy Church would yield him for her sake."

"Stay, father," cried Catherine, "I beseech thee spare me further annoy, nor think I would so distress him. My mind is fully set in this matter; I can yield thee duty no whit."

Sykes, seeing that it was useless to press the high-spirited girl further, replied—

"Be at ease, daughter, I'll urge thee no more. Go, pay thy wonted visit to the hen-yard, and, I beseech thee, forgive me, and believe that I am thy daily beadsman."

After she was gone, he began to cast

about for other ways of furthering his plans; and at length settled, that he could best serve his cause by betaking himself to Exeter, which, by a late advice he was informed, Sir Humfrey Arundel with ten thousand men was besieging for the Church. Sykes' restless activity requiring constant fuel to feed its fire, he resolved to flit while the way was yet open to him. Accordingly, he busied himself in collecting such of his papers as were most valuable, and, having packed up a change of garments and other necessaries for the journey, he reassumed his disguise, and descended to the parlour. Here he found Mistress Catherine, whom he acquainted with his movements, and bade farewell for a time, praying to be served with a strong horse.

His request being readily granted, he departed, journeying through Norfolk without misadventure, and arrived in

due course before the city of Exeter, round about which, as he approached, he saw the camp of his rebellious co-churchmen.

He was soon stopped by a company of them patrolling the outposts; and, on giving his name and style to the Captain, was conducted through the camp to the tent of the leader, Sir Humfrey Arundel, which was distinguished by the broad banner of "Our Ladye" floating above it.

As they went, the Captain, in reply to the queries of the priest, told him that the city had been closely beleaguered for a fortnight or more, and that all supplies of food and drink were cut off, so that it could but be a matter of short time ere the gates would be thrown open to them.

Sykes, keenly scanning the camp, marvelled at the loose and shacking discipline which appeared to be maintained. The

Captain now conducted him to the tent of Sir Humfrey, whom he found seated at a rough table, surrounded by his chief officers in gay uniforms, and by not a few priests in their sombre dress. Indeed, all through the camp, the sacred banners displaying figures of guardian Saints, emblems of the Cross and other tokens, and the soldiery, or rather combatants, bearing the badges of their respective leaders, with the priests openly moving about among them in their distinctive garb, stamped its character that of a religious crusade.

Here a body of men were gathered round a priest saying mass; there a knot of priests were collected in close council.

Arundel gave Sykes a cordial reception. "Ah! Sir Prior, faithful member of the Church militant, welcome to our camp. We trust soon to restore thee to thine old possessions, and to reinstate thee in thy former

House, as we have just done for this our good father, Anthony Court, stringing up his audacious despoiler, Sir Thomas Bullen, whom, mayhap, thou sawest a hanging for a scarecrow afore the Priory gates, as thou didst pass by. Marry!—though long since delivered to the Devil, accursed in sleeping and waking, in town or village, and everywhere anathema, he hath all these years escaped punishment, and waxed fatter and fatter with spoil, till now a tardy fate hath overcome him. Ay, and so have we sworn to serve all such!"

"Thy zeal for holy Church hath ever been a watchword with us, and thou a pattern Knight, good Sir Humfrey," replied Sykes, "I am sanguine that, under thy bold leadership, our star will again peep forth from the clouds, which of late have overshadowed it."

"Well now, reverend sir, thou'rt kind

thus to commend me," continued the Knight, " and I'll promise you 'twill not be Humfrey Arundel's fault, if the cause miscarry. I trust ere many days be past, this stubborn city will be gained. We hear the folks within the walls are divided among them; some speak for yielding, and have already treated; but two Protestantising knaves, Barnard Duffield, and Jack Courtenay, do, by their blatant chatter, prevent them who hold by us from rendering up the place. Wherefore, we have resolved to starve them out, and use their bellies for our good allies. Already have we cut off their water conduits, of which we make bullets to pelt them, thou didst, mayhap, pass the forge on thy way? but I will reserve further talk till the morrow, when we shall hope for the benefit of your council as to our best procedure."

Father Sykes bowed his acknowledg-

ment of Sir Humfrey's courtesy, and promised to attend at the council board; then departed to glean for himself some insight into the manner of the investment.

From a slight eminence he surveyed the city, as it lay before him dim in the twilight; and the cries of the sentries, and the clank of their arms, could ever and anon be plainly heard by him. Here he stood, ruminating awhile, then turned to retrace his steps; but, wrapped in thought, missed his way, and wandered too near the walls, when out of a gate there suddenly issued a party of the watch, who had, doubtless, spied him before, and lain in wait till dark. These pounced on him, and stifling his lusty cries for help, bore their struggling prisoner off in triumph from under the very noses of his friends into the city, where they promptly clapped him in the common ward, and left him, supperless, to his reflec-

tions till the morrow, when, the leader of the citizen band told him, he would be brought up before their worships at the Court House.

He was not long left the sole tenant of his cell, for a great noise presently arose without, and, the door being thrown open, a large, powerfully-built, man was thrust in, who seemed convulsed with passionate indignation, and made so stout a resistance that the guards could scarce overpower him. They succeeded at length, however, in getting him in, when they slammed-to the great oak door, and locked it after them.

The new-comer, on being left alone, gave vent to his rage, and roundly abused his captors in language at once coarse and violent. When his passion had somewhat subsided, the priest coughed slightly to attract his attention, on which his fellow-prisoner

turned, and gazing upon him by the dim light of an oil-lamp, which had in the scuffle been left behind in the cell, shrewdly guessed at his profession.

"Marry! sir," said he, "adversity maketh strange bedfellows! I do perceive thou art a priest of Rome by thy shaven poll; and I,—Ha! Ha!—was, till this morning, the chosen leader of all the haters of papish abominations and priestcraft in Exeter; while now, egad, I be thy comrade in disgrace. Hast heard of Barnard Duffield? Ask any citizen of Exeter, and he will tell thee that 'twas I withstood the presumptuous upstart, Jack Courtenay, to his face, scorning to follow in such a wake; and, lo! the common ward is my bedchamber, sent by the drivelling mayor and his fellow-aldermen. 'Tis bad enough to have tasted neither flesh nor ale these two weeks, and to have fed on puffins and swine's food,

but to be treated to a jailbird's roost is a sorry recompense for good service. Marry! I trust thy belly is not dainty, sir priest, for no morsel of other victual than horse-flesh will they give you here."

Sykes saw the advantage to be derived from conciliating the disgusted and deposed leader, and accordingly, condoled with him in his mortification.

As, however, they had not many topics of conversation in common, both after awhile relapsed into silence, presently broken only by the deep snores of the large-chested, broad-nosed, Duffield, which, acting on the sensitive nerves of Sykes, aggravated him to the verge of distraction, and effectually banished all sleep. In the morning a jailor came with breakfast, which turned out to be as foretold by Duffield—a dish of coarse horseflesh and some puffin-cake, or rather dumpling with prunes, for which

superior fare the priest was, doubtless, indebted to the chance of his companion being a prisoner of so great local importance, as no citizen of Exeter that morning had a more tempting breakfast.

Duffield made a voracious meal, and appeared to relish the fare; but Sykes, unaccustomed to the exigencies of a besieged town, sickened at the bare sight of the food, and merely eat a mouthful of dumpling, the unpalatable flavour of which caused him to spit with disgust.

Before long, the civic guard came for their prisoners, and marched them off between two files of halberdiers, through a gesticulating crowd, which was waiting outside, many of whom were partisans of Duffield, and encouraged him by their loud exclamations, to the Common Hall, where was seated the Worshipful Mayor, with his Aldermen, on the judgement bench. Ere

business was broached, however, there was a great stir among the crowd, which divided as a tall, bold-faced, young woman stalked through, and made her way straight to the worshipful bench.

"'Tis my brave wench, Bess, by the Lord!" exclaimed Duffield, nudging Sykes, who had watched in great astonishment the girl's proceedings. "I'll warrant you, she speaketh her mind to Master Mayor; ay, and clapperclaweth him, too, an he resisteth her will!"

He guessed right, for the girl's shrill voice rose above the murmurs of the throng, as she addressed the startled magistrate.

"Marry come up! a fine fellow you be, forsooth, to lord it over Barnard Duffield! I tell thee, let him go quick, else shalt repent of laying hands on him—thou, whose spirit is better fitted for fingering thy drapings, and hosen, and

ribbon silks, than for adventuring against a brave and bold man—let him go, I say, forthwith! Dost hear me, Master Mayor?"

"Bravo! Bess," called out Duffield, in ecstacy, "well spoken, wench!"

The worthy Mayor, a nervous, timid body, albeit mightily impressed with his dignity, and over-conscious of his state, shuffled on his cushioned chair, and purpled with wrath at being bearded by a woman in the face of his brother citizens.

"Get ye away, girl!" cried he, "else will I send thee to keep thy father company in his prison. Begone!"

Bess seemed transported with passion, and, mindless of her sex, without more ado pressed forward, and caught the pursy mayor a loud smack on his fat cheek, on which his worship bellowed out lustily, and the citizens—seeing the blow, and not knowing but that he might be struck to

death—set up a loud outcry, soon repeated without from mouth to mouth, with due exaggeration, all over the city.

Such was the bewilderment and commotion, that some ran, and set the Church bells ringing, and folks rushed out of their houses to arms, thinking their enemies had made an entrance into the city.

Meantime, the Mayor, having recovered his courage somewhat, and fearing a rescue, ordered Bess to be seized, and hurried off to jail; whither Duffield and Sykes were also dragged back, the council being for the nonce broken up.

Here, however, we must take leave of the priest, and his fortunes, to follow the course of events at Hethersett.

CHAPTER XI.

"No matter, since
They have left their viands behind; for we have
Stomachs"——

TEMPEST.

THE squire of Hethersett, a prisoner all this while in his own house, had found the time pass wearily by, the sole break on each day's solitude being the morning and evening visits of the jailer, who attended to his wants only so far as to provide him with food and drink—usually plain bread and water. It was also his habit to remain in the cell whilst the prisoner went through those petty offices, commonly done by menials.

Flowerdew was fast losing his ruddy,

healthy, colour; and the moping, induced by loneliness, was gradually preying on his spirits, and so on his health. He made an effort at first to beguile the jailer by tempting bribes, but the surly man was honest to his trust; and he was soon convinced that it was useless to try and tamper with him. The only diversion he had was the sound of revelry, which, now and again, reached his aggravated ears when the feasters became in their cups even more quarrelsome and boisterous than usual.

Many a wild thought for escape suggested itself to him, only to be rejected on further consideration. Sometimes he felt tempted to rush on the jailer, and pit himself unarmed against him, despite the disparity of odds in the ugly weapon, without which the man never came. He thought, too, that, if he could slip outside the cell door with just a start in

the gloomy passage, he would be able to baffle pursuit till he reached a vault at the opposite end of the range. There, hidden by a cunningly-designed door of masonry, was a passage, which led for some distance underground, and terminated in a thick spiny surrounding the grotto, called Erget's cave, cut out of the solid rock, which we have seen the two cut-purses, Giles and Box, had taken possession of as a hiding-place for their plunder, secure in the bad reputation it had acquired of being the haunt of the devil himself. Meanwhile, his mind was distracted, and tortured by doubts and fears as to Mistress Catherine Haselwode's safety ; for the jailer had not failed to keep him well posted in Ket's marvellous success ; telling him with a particular relish of all the achievements of the rioters, doubtless according to instructions received from Ket himself ; so

that the Squire was daily fretting at his powerlessness to avenge himself, and to protect his betrothed.

At length he resolved no longer to endure the worry, but to make an attempt for his liberty on the first favourable opportunity, by trying his strength against the jailer's. His simple plot was soon arranged ; and, the better to aid him to his end, he feigned an illness, and betook himself to his straw shakedown whenever the jailer's step was heard, in the hope that this supposed weakness might at length have the effect of putting him off his guard.

The man, unaccustomed to prison ways, was quite taken in by Flowerdew's simple contrivance ; so much so, that he relented a little, and brought him a basin of pottage, and a cup of the squire's own good wine,—being the first time such a luxury had been granted him since his imprisonment.

The wine he swallowed down with an eager relish, and it, acting on his nervous frame, gave him the required excitement and stimulus for his purpose. When he had drained the last drop, taking advantage of the lax habit of leaving the cell door unlocked behind him, into which the jailer had fallen since his illness, and feigning great weakness, he induced the unsuspicious man to assist him in rising.

No sooner was he on his legs, than he threw himself full weight on the fellow, who had no time to draw his weapon, but had to contend with his opponent muscle against muscle.

The suddenness of the attack completely favoured Flowerdew, and he had the best of the wrestle, throwing the other after a momentary tussle on his back. Then, kneeling on his breast, he promptly got hold of the key, which hung at his girdle,

and wrenching himself from the grasp of the astonished jailer darted through the door, which he banged to and locked after him—and not a moment too soon, for the man was up in a twink, and thundering at the door with all the force of his heavy leathern boots.

In his haste Flowerdew had neglected to pick up the lamp, so had to grope his way through the gloom in the direction of the vault, where was the entrance to the secret passage.

Bewildered by the darkness, he was quite puzzled as to the direction of the cellar he wished to find, and the riot, which the jailer kept kicking up against the door of his cell, made him fear that, if the noise reached the ears of the others, they would make a speedy appearance to ascertain the cause, and so he should be cut off from escape.

As his only mode of progression was by feeling with his hands, it is not to be wondered at that he quite lost his reckonings, and he was just debating whether he should not run the gauntlet of the house, when there appeared at the stair head two or three fellows, apparently coming to broach an ale cask; since one had a large black jack, and another a flaming lamp. This shewed Flowerdew his whereabouts, and he recognised the vault he was so anxious to find, into which he slipped; not however so quickly but that his shadow was seen by them, for he heard one say:

"Surely 'twas a bogle, Dick—didst see it, man?—By the mass! I'll not budge another inch—if your throat be dry, go thyself and draw—as for me, I'll get back spry!"

Just then, the jailer renewing his kicks, they recovered their spirits, and forgot all

about the bogle at those signs of mortal life; as Flowerdew, from his hiding place, heard the same voice exclaim with a loud laugh:

"Ha! Ha! methinks Master Flowerdew doth object to our swilling of his good liquor! Come along—we'll find the tap—let him kick, an he will, 'twill avail him naught if he goes on from now till cock-crow—he will but make his own legs ache—the door will stand all Master Flowerdew's kicks—Ha! Ha! kick away, my master! kick away!"

Master jailer did kick away with a vengeance, and raised his husky voice to its full pitch, till at last one of them said —"Why! that's more like jailer Jack's bull's bellow, than Master Flowerdew's soft spoken tones;"—and, going to the cellar door called out through the key hole:—

"Come now, master prisoner, less noise,

else wilt thou fright thine only friends, the rats and toads, from thee, man; and gentle Jack will be wroth, and stop you short of a bellyful for your pains."

To the banterer's great surprise, however, Jack's gruff voice answered instead of Flowerdew's.—

"Unlock the door, Dick, you fool! and waste not time in jawing; else he will be gone for good, and Ket will be stark mad with rage, and string us all up—quick, I say, open! open!"

His passion quite scared the fellows, who, convinced by his voice, tried to open the door; and after fumbling some time with the lock succeeded in doing so, Flowerdew in his haste having left the key in.

The jailer on coming out, cut short their enquiries with—"Dame fortune hath played me a scurvy trick—a murrain on her!—

He's got out. Come along, let's try and lay him by the heels again, he can't be gone far away." So they began searching on all sides for him. Presently they remembered the bogle, and Dick exclaimed—

"This way, Jack, 'twas into yonder cellar I saw the bogle cut." Then they rushed pell mell into the vault, which was empty of all but odd rubbish; so that, baulked and disappointed, they searched one after the other, peeping and peering into every nook.

"Deuce take him," cried the jailer, "this beats warrening; but stick to it, we must unearth the coney, he can't have strayed far. He'd scarce got out when I heard you come down stairs, and is still below that I'll stake my neck on." So again they explored the gloomy recesses of the vaults, in the vain hope of recovering their prey.

Meantime Flowerdew had found the hidden door, and was endeavouring to move the knob, which worked the spring,—it was skilfully wrought, of a size scarce exceeding the brass head of a nail, but it had got rusted by the damp and long disuse, and would not answer his coaxing. He had almost begun to despair, as he heard their voices approach nearer and nearer; when, giving a fiercer wrench than before, to his great joy the door, contrived of joggle-jointed masonry to match the walls, turned slowly on its pivot, and in his haste he nearly pitched down the steps, which led from it into the passage, and gave his head a smart bump against the low lintel. Closing the door silently behind him, he was forced to go on his hands and knees, and make his way onward feeling each step before him, while the slimy crawling things, with which his hands came

in contact, caused his very flesh to creep with disgust. In due time he emerged into the grotto, to which a door similarly contrived gave access, and felt with a sigh of relief the fresh breath of heaven once again.

Little fearing that his mode of flight would be soon discovered, Flowerdew resolved to delay in the cave till night, and then trusting to the disguise afforded by his ragged doublet and hose, and the wild length of his hair and beard, which had not been polled since his imprisonment, to assume the part of a wandering ballad troller, for he could ever pitch a stave, when called on, at the merry hawkings, and hunting gatherings, or a love-ditty, when, as he often had been, pressed by the fair sex.

He soon heard voices shouting and calling to each other in loud tones all around,

by which he guessed that, failing to find his mode of exit, they supposed he had escaped through the house. Presently some of them approached quite near, and one exclaimed—

"What! look into Erget's cave? No, indeed! if he be there, i' God's name let him stay, I'll not go anear. Well do we know the devil himself on two sticks doth walk there. Oh, no! I reckon Master Flowerdew's too sharp to run to the devil even to cut from Ket. Why! Joe Box himself did see him, and parson Whitehead was so affrighted once there that he spoke an anathema on the habitant of the cave; but it so did hurt him that he could not make a preachment to the godly folks next Sabbath day; for the leech pronounced him sore troubled of palpitations, and all of the devil. Come! let's away while we may."

With a sigh of relief, Flowerdew heard

their retreating steps and voices; then, feeling dry and thirsty, he called to mind that in one corner of the cave there gushed a spring of pure water from the rock; so he went and lay flat down while he slaked his thirst at the sweet flowing stream, which seemed to him more delicious than the rich red Burgundy, or brown ale, he had been used to quaff.

In rising his foot kicked against some substance, which sent forth a metallic ring, and he instinctively put out his hand to pick it up. On taking it to the lighter end of the cave, to his astonishment he beheld his own silver drinking-cup, on which his armorial sign was graven. This induced him to prosecute a further search, when he soon unearthed Dame Starling's pearl necklet, and a parcel of gold sovereigns and Wolsey groats—to say nothing of broidered cauls, girdles and wearing

apparel, a clock of silver gilt, a chessboard, sundry gold spoons, and many another article hidden away by the light-fingered Box and Giles.

"Heyday!" chuckled he to himself, "here, at least, be some who dare brave the devil—methinks ere long they will be paying him a visit. Wherefore I'd best scuttle afore they come; but it can be no sin to take one's own, so I'll just make bold to grace me with this velvet cap, 'twill well become a wild, roving minstrel. Ay, and here's a lute, by my faith! the very one good Aunt Dorothy Strongitharm gave as a keepsake to mine own dear mother, long years since, and with her name inscribed."

Enchanted with his luck, he set to work and appropriated such of the garments as he judged best to suit his assumed character, secreting within the passage his silver cup, and many other of his pilfered chattels.

He had begun to stuff his pockets with broad pieces, when he was disturbed by the trampling of feet and crackling of twigs, and had but just time to pop into his lurking-place, leaving the door ajar so that he could peep out.

The new-comers were evidently in a merry mood, and it would seem something had tickled them mightily, for one spoke with a laugh.

"Ha! Ha! these fools are playing into our hands. We've so stuffed their poor weak noddles with this tale that they mistook a screech owl in the spiny for the devil himself—cackling geese as they be; yet do they so suit us, better than if they were foxes, as we be. The fox doth hide his prey, and so 'tis with Joe Box and Peter Giles, eh? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Ha! Ha!" chorussed the other; "by St. Becket's bones! thou hast a rare wit,

comrade; and I've an appetite to match it. So then, here we be, all ready for a carousal. What hast thou there—Rhenish? Good! See, I've a pie of tender pullet, and some well-roded bacon, with a bite of white wheatcake. By cock and pye! a supper on the sly is a whimsical conceit, and a pleasant. Let's fall to; I'll go fetch the drinking-cup, whilst you lay out the victuals."

Flowerdew from his place of concealment heard him go to the other end of the cavern, whence he presently called out—

"Hallo! What now! By the blessed St. Margit Pattens, some foul thief hath been here—the tankard's gone—Ah!" added he with a cry of rage, "and so too be the broad pieces!—and the necklet!—and I know not what else beside—False villain! 'tis thou, none other durst come here!"

"Villain thyself, man!" replied Box, "I'll just slice that ugly copper-red nose of thine, so that thine own mother would not own thee, if thou darest thus to—"

"Ha!" exclaimed he, as Giles sprang on him, and they wrestled together, till a heavy fall told that one had gained the mastery, and Flowerdew heard Box say—

"Now will I pay a debt of favour long outstanding, and teach thee better manners, thou false cur, than thus to fall foul of thy bosom chum. Two minutes do I give thee to make thy last prayer, then will I send thee to visit thine old friend the devil. Marry! he'll not let you go in a hurry!"

Then he opened a clasp knife with a loud click, while the fallen hero abjectly begged his life, and professed sorrow in fulsome terms for his hasty abuse.

The sense of freedom had so exhilarated

Flowerdew's pent up spirits, that he could no longer restrain his merriment, and, putting his hand to his mouth, he perpetrated a most ghostly and devilish screech. Scarcely had he uttered his yell, which reverberated down the passage, and echoed all round the grotto, so that one might suppose the place tenanted by evil imps, than, with hushed voices, the wrangling heroes picked themselves up, and fled as fast as they could scuttle from the spot, forgeting their quarrel in the sudden fright.

Flowerdew indulged in a hearty guffaw, and coming out calmly helped himself to their supper. Hungry as he was, he found the pullet pie and flask of Rhenish a very refreshing meal after his long abstinence; and, with many a smack of relish, he demolished a part of the pie, and gulped down the invigorating wine; which done, he felt considerably more like his former self.

Night had now quite closed in : and, as he guessed the defrauded thieves would not be likely to favour him with a return visit, he resolved to postpone till another day his departure from the cave ; doubting not that by then his limbs, now cramped by long confinement, would be better able to endure the stiff walking he expected to get. Accordingly, choosing a dry corner for his bed he laid himself down, and was soon buried in the first comfortable sleep he had enjoyed since the day of his misfortune.

CHAPTER XII.

"Thy daughter I have dearly loved
Full long and many a day;
But with such love as holy kirk
Hath freely said we may."

THE CHILDE OF ELLE.

YEOMAN GOODEVE and his wife had, in common with all the steady going folks thereabout, viewed Ket's proceedings with amazement and dislike.

The rapid way in which the gentry had been, one after another, overthrown by him had filled their honest, orderloving, hearts with alarm; for they knew that with the well-being of the gentry their own prosperity was linked. It was not long before their wisdom was tested, Goodeve's cattle

and sheep being freely seized on, and carried off for the feeding of Ket's large-mouthed idle host.

Peggy, however, wilfully persisted in regarding Will Dickson as a hero, and dared to brave her parents' opinions, moping at their determination to keep her apart from her sweetheart.

On this morning the grumbling farmer had gone to his wheat-fields, and there found a large party of rioters busily employed trampling under foot, and cutting down, his ripening corn. On expostulation he had been treated to hard words and threatened with hard blows, wherefore he was returning homewards in a state of wholesome rage; when, as chance would have it, he met Will Dickson—or Lieutenant Dickson, as he was styled by Ket's men.

The sight of Will roused all the choler of the farmer, who, stopping his hurried

walk as the other came up, let loose his pent-up feelings.

"Marry! I do marvel thou darest come anigh me, man!—I tell thee 'twill be of no avail, an thou seekest again to cajole me. By the Lord! I swear me, thou shalt never more have speech with Peggy,—you'll be strung up for a crackhemp ere long, else I be much mistook. Thinkest thou, because for a brief space this Ket hath prevailed, that no reprisal will be took? You'll soon learn that Kings have long hands, and see his scurvy crew melt as wax in the bright sunshine afore the King's trained men, who even now be handy."

"Nay, nay, Gaffer," replied Will, good-temperedly bearing with the farmer's wrath, "be not too hard on us—credit me, you're wrong advised; Ket hath so laid his plans that never a King's force can withstand him. We do but wait to get our

grievance put straight, and then will return to our homes in peace. King Ket can battle with King Edward, if need be. We seek for naught, save equal partition of lands and chattels 'twixt gentle and simple."

"Which you'll never get, thou stupe," burst in the farmer. "Can not thy shallow pate tell thee an such a work were done to-day, that o'the morrow some would be the richer; others, wastrels, the poorer? Naught but experience can make a fool wise, though, I trow!"

"Have thine own way, Gaffer," said Will, "and hold me to be a fool if it pleaseth thee, I'll not quarrel with thee for it. Try not, though, to rob me of my very own,—your Peggy and I be long plighted; and in sooth she is the very apple of mine eye. Let me speak with her, kind Sir."

"Hold thy saucy tongue, fellow!" replied the angry yeoman. "Great gifts do make

the beggar bold, forsooth ! Never again shall our Peggy have speech with the like of you.—And yet," added he, somewhat relenting, as the memory of former times came over him, "even now, Will, I could a'most find it in my heart to forgive thee. Come, pledge me thy word to cut from this Ket, and stick to honest plough ; and let me see thee busied with the muck wain, so that thy tilled land may give some promise of a yield ; then, I'll not say but in time I might forgive thee, and let thee see our wench again."

"Nay, then," answered Will, with spirit, "methinks, 'tis I should forgive thy stubborn-hearted pride. Marry ! am I not own lieutenant to the mighty Captain Ket, and thou but a yeoman ? No, Gaffer, I'll not ask for Peggy on those terms."

"Then begone !" said Goodeve, "and cross not my threshold again, lest I be

tempted to try my strength with thine, and take some vengeance for thy ill doings." And the sturdy farmer, turning on his heel, left Will to his meditations, who bent his way thoughtfully towards the encampment.

"Why, Will, man!" cried Ket, who in high good humour was at supper when Dickson presented himself, and noticing the downcast looks of his lieutenant rallied him. "Art down in the mouth? I'll warrant that saucy jade hath provoked thee. Never heed her, you're too good to wed with a yeoman's wench. 'Twill go hard but I find thee a mate among these lily-handed gentle girls, who be in our hands. There's Mistress Joan Starling, straight built, and a comely lass enough—or, brown-eyed Mistress Marget Hearnshaw, than whom a trimmer never stepped—Or, stay, wouldst prefer a blue-eyed wench? What dost say to Dolly Luttrell, whom, ere many days

be past, I hope to find at Thorpe? Beshrew me, an I think not either were well mated to Robert Ket's lieutenant!"

"Kind sir," replied Will, "thou hast mistook me, I do but feel hurt that Goodeve hath forbade me further speech with Peggy, who is loving as a dove, and true as steel. Naught he can say, or do, will turn her from me—that I'll stake my life on. I'll not break my troth with her for all his hard words. Yet, should I like to hear again from her sweet lips that her love is still aright towards me. Long absence will make her heart grow sick!"

"Why did the farmer refuse thee speech of her?" asked Ket.

"Gramercy! to tell truth, sir," replied Will, hesitatingly, "he did offer me favour again, an I'd leave thee and turn to plough again."

"Ah! dared he tempt thee so!" cried

Ket, in a passion. "By the Lord! I'll find speedy means of speech for thee, despite him. Thou sayest the wench is true—why not take a company, and release her from his controul? What! dost shake thy head? Pshaw! Captain Ket will act for thee; ere many days be past I'll promise thee thy sweetling. But, hark ye! first must we get the mastery over this strong house, and that haughty damsel, whose beauty hath set my soul aflame. Then could we have a twin wedding; Ket shall wed the Lady on the selfsame day that Dickson mates with the May-queen! Marry, 'twould be a brimming cup of vengeance, an I paired with Flowerdew's nest-bird! But now, Will, go, see to thy men; on the morrow we must essay with a will against this stubborn Hall."

Thus did the bold and ambitious Leader open up his game; and, while Mistress

Catherine was enjoying some sort of relief in the absence of the zealous priest, Ket was planning an immediate attempt to get hold of her.

Michael Sykes' persistent endeavour to lure Ket over to his side by a partial concurrence in his schemes had much vexed Catherine's lofty spirit; and all her natural pride had been aroused as the conviction dawned upon her that Sykes wanted to treat her as a puppet, of which he should be wire-puller.

In spite of the shock which this discovery gave to her earliest prejudices, her devotion to the Church itself yet remained unshaken.

She had, however, but small time to brood over reflections of this kind; for news came to Captain Daffrow, from a friendly countryman—who having in former days received favours from the people at

the hall, was not now unmindful of them, in pleasing contrast to many another ungrateful churl, and had come in, breathless, with his news—that Ket had started from Mousehold towards Thorpe, with a large company of men. On receiving the tidings, Daffrow at once summoned all the retainers, who were without, to repair inside the walls, and took prompt measures to be in readiness for the anticipated attack, that Master Ket might not catch them napping. The hall was the last of the great houses thereabouts which had resisted ; and now stood solitary, without a chance of any relief being afforded to its defenders yet awhile. But the spirit was roused in the bosom of the last daughter of the knightly race of Haselwode, who proudly declared rather to risk the destruction of her house than to yield it up at the first call to the captain of such a scurvy crew.

Her retainers, whose fathers before them had served with and fought under the flag of her sires at Cressy and Agincourt, at Barnet and Bosworth field, and who were loyally attached to her, mustered strongly when first called on. Daffrow, too, had taken advantage of his time, and stored the hall with provisions, strengthening its defences, and laying in an additional store of powder and shot, surreptitiously got from Norwich, so that by skilful management, and by husbanding his resources of food and ammunition, he hoped to hold out till the king's troops should come and divert the attention of the rebels.

The old warrior, now in all the panoply of war, was occupied from morn till dusk in surveying his defences and drilling his men, some of whom he stationed in the turrets, others on the walls. The portcullis with its strongly-laced crossbars of iron

having been lowered, and the bridge drawn, the inmates of Thorpe Hall quietly expected the appearance of their foe. They had not long to wait. Next day the watchman sighted Ket's men, divided into several companies, marching along in loose array. The sage captain, closely reconnoitering, drew his conclusion that they were strong solely by reason of numbers, their free and easy method of progression, and loose, undisciplined style, marking them as unreliable in the face of trained soldiers. But the retainers of Mistress Catherine Haselwode were not anything much to boast of in the way of their military knowlege, being yeomen and dependants drawn from the manor. Many of them had wives and children, and these Catherine had insisted should be brought to the hall also for shelter; therefore, the place, despite its capacity, was somewhat

put to to find sleeping room for them all, and the stabling had to be requisitioned, and fitted up for such of the men as could not be accommodated in the dormitories of the house.

The approaching bands having halted without musket shot, sent forward a trumpeter, accompanied by one of their leaders, with a white flag. On coming up to the walls he blew a loud blast; and, the bridge being lowered, his companion rode up to the portcullis and handed a missive to Daffrow, who carried it off to his lady for reading. On breaking the clumsy seal, she read—

"MISTRESS CATHERINE HASELWODE,—

"You be hereby required to yield up peaceably your house and chattels, with the fighting men and arms, within the space of six hours to the undersigned.

Else, know that none within shall be held to quarter. Given on behalf of the Army of Reformation,

"CAPTAIN KET."

"Now, by our Ladye!" cried Catherine, "the tanner lacketh not modesty! Captain Ket, forsooth! What sayest thou, Daffrow? How shall we answer this provoking fellow?"

"In good sooth," said the Captain, "the best answer my poor wit can devise would be to seize his trumpeter and herald. Ay, and string them both up over the guard-house as a warning to their fellows, like Ket did hang his own jailer at Hethersett for letting Master Flowerdew slip out."

"Nay, nay, good Daffrow," replied Catherine, "bethink thee, 'twould in truth be sorry justice to smite the helpless tool,

while the hand which wields it gets off scot free. Rather, hie thee back to the gate, and bid them be gone quick, and tell this Ket that Catherine Haselwode wotteth not of the Army of Reformation, nor holdeth terms with him, who subscribeth himself Captain Ket."

Daffrow, in obedience to his lady's order returned to the gate, and, handing back the missive to the bearer, delivered her message, adding a few words of his own, suggestive of prompt punishment if the presumptuous messengers dared to dally. This was, however, hardly necessary ; they were but too thankful to get away with a safe skin, and sped back fast as their nags could take them to the main body. The defenders, watching from the walls, saw the herald and his trumpeter ride up to their chief and report themselves, after which, Ket by his gesticulations appeared

to be addressing his men, then he took his banner and waved it defiantly aloft, while his followers set up a hoarse cheer. They then spread round the walls, posting themselves so as to cut off the besieged from all communication with the outside world. Thus was the siege begun by the forming of a strict blockade; and, as the defenders of Thorpe were determined to resist to the last, Daffrow at once set about making careful arrangements for an economical use of the stores, which he divided into daily rations.

Mistress Catherine Haselwode herself, giving up those personal luxuries, to which she had been accustomed, put herself on the same footing as the meanest of her followers. Nor could all the persuasions of Daffrow and Dorothy Luttrell induce her to alter her course, which earned for her the devoted fidelity of her people.

Let us, however, now look for awhile into the camp of the besiegers.

Captain Ket had fixed his quarters in a small farm house,—the home of one of Catherine's tenants, but just now deserted by him and his family, who had removed with their chattels inside the Hall walls for safety—and was sitting in the kitchen, puzzling over a rough map of the place and its defences.

The tale brought by his messengers as to the strength of the place, and the number of its garrison, forced him to the conclusion that it would be quite useless to try and get possession by assault, without the aid of cannon to make a breach in the outer walls. This was by no means a satisfactory discovery to him, as he had completely reckoned on the house being yielded up at the first summons, like so many others had been, that he had not thought it necessary

to hinder his march with the artillery, of which there was a tolerable supply at Mousehold—got from Norwich, whose citizens had opened their gates in hot haste from fear of a sacking on the appearance of the martial Ket. Moreover, scouring parties had been down as far as the coast, where they had plundered cannon from the ships, which lay at Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

With Ket were his brother, Will Dickson, and other leaders crowding the little room; all of whom knew better how to plough, or to ply their trade, than to conduct a siege in military fashion.

They agreed, however, that it would be sheer madness to attempt to climb the walls, defended as they were by well armed and determined men.

"Marry now!" cried Ket, "I'll wager our iron-mouthed squelchers will bring my lady to book. Come, Will, take a com-

pany, and bring them up, and the sooner we see thy face again the better shall we be pleased. Tarry not an hour."

Accordingly, Dickson went off with his men to fetch the guns, leaving Ket chafing at the delay, and burning with impatience to batter the walls of the defiant Mistress of Thorpe, and rendered so much the more eager by her opposition.

Pending the arrival of the cannon, both sides watched each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The copse must give my evening fare,
Some mossy bank my couch must be,
Some rustling oak my canopy."
THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

IT is time we took a peep at Master Flowerdew, whom we left sound asleep in Erget's cave after his lucky escape from the Hethersett vaults. He, on awaking, found the sun high up in the sky, so was forced to wait till dark before he ventured to come out of his hiding-hole. The day was spent in making preparations, and fitting out a rough disguise to his mind. When night drew on, he shouldered his lute and struck across the country, having a perfect know-

ledge of the whereabouts of each wood and covert that would afford him temporary concealment—his plan being, to journey by night and lie hid in the day time. As he came out of the coppice which fringed the cave, he stood and gazed at his home, where it lay close by. From the many lights shining out of the windows, and the wild bursts of merriment, which ever and anon reached his ear, he concluded that the rioters were in full enjoyment of their free quarters.

There were no signs of a watch about, and everything betokened that the occupants held themselves to be in a state of complete security.

"Oh!" sighed Flowerdew, "oh, for a bare handful of mine old trusty varlets, and I would soon relieve yonder walls from the burthen of these knaves!" But it was one thing to wish, and another to

possess; and, as the trusty varlets could not be summoned, save by a magic wand, there remained to the indignant master no other course open, than to avail himself of the enemy's negligence and continue his flight.

All hedges and palings having been long since broken down and torn up, he met with few obstructions, while he strode along boldly across his demesne, giving the house a wide berth. This was all very well for a start, but the necessity of obtaining food would soon force him to approach some habitation; else he could reckon on no better victual than nuts and haws. Towards morning he was tired of his walk, and glad to creep into the shade of a friendly wood, where, scraping together some leaves, he placed his back against the trunk of a wide-spreading beech, and ruminated on his prospects.

The result of his cogitation was, that he resolved to risk detection, and make for a little roadside hostel, which lay on an unfrequented by road, against the Hamlet of Downham. Here, at least, he knew he could get a crust of chete bread, and a cup of beer. At first he had hesitated whether he should not go to farmer Goodeve's, but the risk of falling in with Ket's men there decided him to take the other course.

Although he was well known in these parts, yet the change wrought in his appearance by the growth of his beard, and by his long straggling locks, rusty doublet and lute, made so good a disguise, that it would take a sharp eye to find Master Andrew Flowerdew, Esquire of Hethersett, in the strolling troller with ragged clothes and unpolled hair.

Flowerdew laughed to himself, as the

odd contrast struck him, "I' faith, I'm but a beggar with an empty pouch, who can sing afore the footpad!" forgetting that he had the chinkling pieces of the robbed thieves stowed snugly away.

He could hardly persuade himself that he was not dreaming, so strange did it seem that he should thus have become an outcast; but, ponder as he might, he could not overget the stern reality which haunted him.

As he sat on his bed of crackling leaves beneath the beech, the nuts of which lay in plenty around, and afforded an unsatisfactory breakfast, he began to feel rather thankful that fortune had landed him free from his enemies, than disposed to repine at his necessities; discovering that, after all, hunger was the best sauce.

A smart red-coated robin was from an adjacent bush warbling his sociable notes

of greeting, as he watched the long-locked man partaking of breakfast from the same broad table as himself; now and then stifling his voice, as he darted down and picked up a grub, but returning to his perch to resume his song.

"The nyghttingale will scarse be tame,
No companye kepe he can;
He dare not show his face for shame,
He feareth the loke of man;
But Robyn like a man can loke,
And dothe shunne no place;
He will synge in every noke,
And stare you in the face.
He takith bred upon the borde,
And then awaye he goes;
Wherefore, to tell you at a worde,
His noble kynde he showes."

Many another wild waif, too, seemed disposed to make his acquaintance. First, a field-mouse ran over his leathern boot, nor did it seem scared when its little bright eye caught his gaze, but scuttled unconcernedly away to its burrow under the moss. On a limb of the tree, just over his head,

sat a white-throated squirrel, on his brick-brown haunches, cracking his nut with a connoisseur-like air; while a brown, sheeny-skinned snake lay curled on a bank hard by, sunning in the morning rays which glinted through a break in the foliage.

The ousted squire felt that animal nature sympathised and claimed fellowship with him in his trouble, and found the fancy soothing. After a while he got up from his couch, and stretched his limbs; then, leaving the shelter of the wood, took his way in the direction of Downham. Carefully avoiding the roads, he made his track across pastures and marshes, and in a roundabout way, till by-and-by, he came to the hamlet. As he went, he was scarcely surprised to note that he met with none of the light-hearted, plodding, tillers of the soil. There were no ploughs going, no fallows formed, hardly a beast or sheep

about—these, indeed, had ere this been plundered and butchered for the feeding of Ket's hungry followers. All work seemed at a standstill, the little cottages deserted by the men, and tenanted by women alone.

In front of one stood a peasant woman with two or three children about her. She was occupied in washing her coarse-spun linen, and Flowerdew, as he passed, bade her a cheery good day to which she responded and, knowing that all her sort loved a gossip over the washtub, lingered and chatted. Presently, he ventured to ask her where Master Ket was now located.

"Eh? man," replied the woman, "dost not know that he be camped at Mousehold? and there my own goodman, and many a hundred other, be with him. Wouldst believe it? My Dick did first hang back, and wanted not to go,—saying, forsooth,

he was against such goings on—but I told him every man with pluck should go, and then he'd get his share, so he went. Oh! 'twill be a blythe time for us poor folk after a bit, Master Minstrel, I can tell you! Listen, I'll whisper thee a secret. 'Tis said, the great captain hath pledged him to part all the gentlefolks' lands in equal bits, so that each shall have a piece. I've told Dick to bespeak a slice of Hethersett, where Master Flowerdew did live, and his sires afore him many a long year. Why, bless you! he's but a very vagrom now!"

Flowerdew could not repress a smile of amusement as he heard the peasant woman's talk; and the cool manner in which she announced herself as the future possessor of his land tickled him mightily.

"Which part, then, of Hethersett," answered he, "hast fixed thy mind on?

mayhap 'tis the house and pleasance, with just an acre or two of the park land ?"

"Well, now," said the woman, "to speak truth, I have heard the captain meaneth the house for his lieutenant, lucky Will Dickson, who is a courting gaffer Goodeve's Peggy; but, they do say, the farmer hath turned crossgrained, and swears his Peggy shall no longer keep company with the likes of Will; and Thorpe Hall is for the great captain himself—he's a hankering after that lily-handed, papish Mistress Haselwode. No, man! I shall be easy with a piece of the rich park, enough to graze a cow and plant with pot-herbs."

"I make no doubt, dame, an Ket keepeth his oath, and parteth the gentlefolks' land among all comers, thou'lt get a fair slice; and, i' faith! methinks a smart damask gown would not ill become thee. I've seen, in my journeyings, many a worse

favoured madam bedecked in gown and partlet. Be these thy pretty chicks?" asked the sly minstrel.

The woman was quite charmed by his simple flattery, and would in no wise rest till she had forced him to enter her cot, and set out for him a meal of coarse bread and bacon, chattering the while of future luck in store for her.

The minstrel fed well; then, thinking it a good opportunity for airing his minstrelsy, struck up and sang a simple ballad, to which the woman listened with unconcealed pleasure, the story dove-tailing with her romantic fancy:—

'Twas on a fair and blithesome day,
In the jovial month of May,
There rode along, right gay and free,
A springal knight of high degree,
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Lo! as he pranced adown the street,
A peasant lass he happed to meet;
She stood a washing just afore
Her gaffer's little cottage door,
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Sir Ralph, he drew his bridle rein,
And sat stock still with 'stonished mien,
A gazing on the pretty maid,
Who kept on ne'er a whit afraid,
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Sweet woodbine clomb, and wild rose hung
Atop the porch, 'neath which she sung,
While, busy as a honey bee,
On at her humble task worked she,
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Now, by St. John! the young knight swore,
Ne'er have I seen a wench afore,
'Mongst all the maids of quality,
So comely, or so fair as she,
A singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

With which, from off his steed he leaped,
And nearer coming askance peeped,
When, lo! the maiden stopt her song,
And bade the bold knight get along,
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Sweet maid, quoth he, be not unkind,
Thy grace hath smit me sudden blind;
Wot well, I'd make thee my ladye,
So pry'thee, do my ladye be?
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Alack! cried she, that may not be,
Such state, fair sir, would ill fit me,
Who long be plighted to Bill Mow—
A truer man than thou, I trow!
Singing, tra la, la, la, la lee.

Sir Ralph, he coaxed, but coaxed in vain,
The maid kept faithful to her swain,
So downcast, and with heavy heart,
He left the lass, and did depart,
Sighing, ah, me! ah, me! ah, me!

The song finished, she renewed her gossip, and the minstrel drew much useful information from her. She told him that bands were patrolling round all the district in search of Master Flowerdew; and that Ket was in a towering rage at his escape, and had sworn an oath that when he next caught him, he would keep him in a safer way. She also said that the wretched jailer had swung for his negligence, and hung over the gate at Hethersett; winding up her tale with the news that Ket had promised ten gold pieces and a lieutenant's place to the man who brought in Flowerdew, dead or alive.

This last was scarcely pleasant information to the minstrel; so, his inner man being refreshed with the meal, and his wit sharpened by the woman's chatter, he took up his lute again, and, bidding her farewell, pursued his journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

"On battlement and bartizan
Gleamed axe, and spear, and partizan;
Falcon and culver on each tower,
Stood prompt their deadly hail to shower;
And flashing armour frequent broke,
From eddying whirls of sable smoke,
Where, upon tower and turret head,
The seething pitch and molten lead
Reeked, like a witch's cauldron red.
While yet they gaze, the bridges fall,
The wicket opes, and from the wall
Rides forth the hoary Seneschal."

THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL.

THORPE HALL was still under siege, and Ket was fuming at the delay. The small cannon, which Dickson brought up from Mousehold, had been placed with some judgement on an eminence, and the Captain himself fired the first shot against the walls

amid the acclamation of his followers; it was, nevertheless, but ill directed, and fell wide of the mark. Meantime the garrison, on their part, from the turrets and walls worried the besiegers with their falconets, which often dropped an unexpected shot among the clustered assailants, causing them to scatter like a covey of birds. Ket's men, however, improved by practice, till at length the range was acquired, and they peppered the strong walls without intermission, so that they yielded to the stronger force of the iron storm, and a breach was made—some twenty feet of the wall being levelled. Few of the defenders were hurt by the missiles, but of the besiegers many a man was picked off by old Daffrow's well-aimed shots.

The breach being made, Ket determined to try his assault without delay; and when dark had set in moved forward, preceded

by men carrying bags of earth to fling in the moat, in order to facilitate the passage. But the garrison had not been idle the while, having piled up stones and wood faggots to barricade the breached wall; and the watchmen keeping a good look-out, soon discovered their approach. Then Daffrow quickly had his men together to receive them, and the bold assaulters got a warmer reception than they had bargained for. Balls of tow and other combustible stuff, steeped in oil, had been got ready, which, being ignited, were thrown from the walls into their midst, and the flaring light enabled the defenders securely to pick off their opponents, who did not long relish the job, and presently refused to advance to the breach, about which a number of their fellows were lying dead and wounded; so Ket reluctantly ordered a retreat. If, however,

they supposed they were to get off scot-free, they had much mistaken the pluck of the Thorpe men. No sooner had they turned tail than the portcullis was promptly drawn, and there rushed out over the lowered bridge Daffrow with a picked band, who, throwing themselves on the confused mass, inflicted a severe loss on them. Then in the darkness the flurried and frightened mob began to fight with each other, the conflicting cries of "A Ket ! a Ket !"—"For our Ladye and Haselwode !" mixed with shrieks, and hoarse cries of wounded and dying, making a scene of great bewilderment. Ket, quite powerless to stop the flight of his men, ran with them for the sake of his own skin. But it was no part of Daffrow's plan to pursue his foes, until like rats they turned by excess of pressure, so he recalled his company and retired within the walls satisfied

with his success. Nevertheless it was clear that, unless prompt relief came, famine would accomplish what Ket was unable to do.

After this repulse great excitement, fuss, and confusion prevailed all through the camp of the Reformers, which occupied Ket and his lieutenants some time in quelling. Then they set about tending to the wounded men; for, mortified as the Leader was at the damage done to his credit by this ignominious retreat, he knew well enough that his best chance of retaining influence over his followers was by ministering to their animal wants. Accordingly he visited them with the leeches in their huts and quarters, and interested himself in looking to their creature comforts; while for the rest he caused ample supplies of victual and strong beer to be served out to renovate their spirits. This

done, he settled himself down to wait for the foe within to starve out his opponents, whom by this time he thoroughly respected, rather than risk another venture against their walls.

The days sped on, and the garrison of Thorpe began to be sorely pinched for food, so much so that many of the weaker of the women and children succumbed and died.

Daily did the watchman look out for a glimpse of the spears of the expected King's men, and daily was he doomed to disappointment. At length the rations were so reduced that Captain Daffrow waited on his mistress, and informed her that there now remained but a bare day's victual in the place. Then he sought her permission to make a night sally, and, placing the women in the midst, to try and slip through the enemy.

Mistress Catherine listened to her Captain's report with grief, and sadly replied to him :—

" Nay, good Daffrow, believe me, I am downright sickened of this blood-letting, and will have never another of my faithful friends spill their's without avail for my sake, since afterward we must perforce yield us. Wherefore, o' the morrow I will to deliver up the place; but do you, Daffrow, and all other who list, sally forth and try to make an escape, and may the good God be with ye! Fear not lest these churls should maltreat us poor women, rather 'twill be on thee, and mine other brave fellows, their wrath will fall. Ah! Daffrow, as long as there remained a crust for ye all, so long would I be content to share it with ye, and to withstand this forward Ket. But now, when starvation is the hard lot of all who hold by me—

although God knoweth I'd rather die than yield to this fellow—do I owe a duty to all these warm-hearted folks, for whose lives, if needlessly wasted, I shall have to render strict account before the footstool of my God. Ye see, too, these tender women and babes, of whom already some have died, while the fever hath laid hold on others. In sooth, I must take heed for their further welfare, even if in so doing all mine own pride and dignity be the price. Pr'ythee, let it be known through the walls, that all who desire to try and get clear away can leave, for on the morrow Catherine Haselwode will have neither house to protect, nor bread to feed her faithful followers."

Tears stood in the girl's eyes as she spoke, and looked, every inch of her, a true and worthy representative of her knightly house.

Poor old Daffrow was much moved at his lady's distress, and roundly vowed his intention to stay and share her fate, and to try for terms of honourable capitulation. He then went into the court-yard, and, calling the men together, delivered his mistress's message. All refused to avail themselves of her offer to seek escape, but loudly declared they were willing to rush out and fight for her sake, if she would but give the word. Daffrow, however, only shook his head; he well knew how impossible it would be to persuade her to that. Then, heavy-hearted, he went to the guard-house and hung out a white flag.

The signal was speedily answered by the appearance of a trumpeter and messenger from the other side, to whom the Captain made known that, on condition of honourable respect for the persons of the inmates, and full quarter for her fighting

men, Mistress Haselwode would yield up her house to Captain Ket.

The envoy departed and reported to his Leader the terms proposed by the garrison, to which he readily enough agreed, and then went forward to the gate with a large company. Here Daffrow stood awaiting him, to whom Ket announced his acceptance of Mistress Haselwode's terms, and, the portcullis being raised, strode in at the head of his fellows, who crushed after him pell mell, almost doubting their luck.

Daffrow handed to Ket the keys of the place when he entered, and these that triumphant leader took from him in a rough-handed way, saying, rudely, "Methought, my master, 'twas of custom for the vanquished to uncover to his conqueror—ay, and oft to kneel, too, in grateful humility for the boon of his life."

"And I tell thee, Sir Ket," retorted

Daffrow, "that I never yet uncovered head to my victor in fair fight, nor ever will to thee, who art no conqueror by battle, but rather a turntail runaway—There's my glove!—I dare thee try a bout with me." With which, he pulled off his great leathern glove and dashed it down at the feet of Ket, who purpled with rage, and half drew his sword as if with the intention of putting the matter to instant issue, but seemingly thought better of it, for he let the sword slip back, exclaiming,—

"'Tis not fitting for the Captain leader of this mighty army to fight with any squabbling varlet, who may chance to fall foul of him. Marry though! since this swordless captain is now not on a par with the very meanest of his victors, I declare that any one of ye, my fellows, who listeth to take a turn with him, hath free license—ay, and if he conquer the loud-

tongued braggart, shall have his armour and equipment for booty. Who speaks ?"

None among them, however, appeared eager to respond to Ket's invitation, and while they were hesitating, Daffrow hotly answered,—

"Thinkest then, man, that thou canst range thy betters in their style and rank ? Thou, who art but a self-styled Captain, forsooth ! Why ! 'twas an honour done thee, when the seneschal of Thorpe offered thee fair arbitrament; and, if thou thinkest I will combat with these rapscallions, thou art much mistook—I, indeed, who am a full Captain, earned by tough fighting ! Go to !"

To all appearance, matters were becoming serious, for the rival Captains eyed each other like game-cocks.

Ket, however, smothered his rage, and replied,—

"Beware, sirrah, lest you tempt me beyond patience with the unbridled license of thy boastful tongue. By Heaven! were I not pledged to quarter, I'd hang thee up atop yonder turret, as I've served many a better man than thou afore this!"

At this moment Mistress Haselwode with Dorothy Luttrell came towards them from the house, and their appearance fortunately caused a diversion, the Captains ceasing their fiery declamations. Ket performed a clumsy salute to the lady, who, however, scarcely acknowledged his effort, for with feminine instinct she saw in the gleam of gratified triumph lurking in his sensuous eyes an omen, that it might have been better had she allowed her followers to try and cut a way for her through the foe.

"Methinks, Mistress," said he, "it had been more profitable if this doughty

captain of thine had yielded up your house when first summoned; 'twould have saved us all this spent time, which it hath been mighty tantalising to waste—to say nought of the lives it hath cost us. But since at last we be gotten within your stubborn walls, I'll warrant you we'll take care of them—ay, and my merry dogs shall make them ring with many a carouse. Meantime, 'tis our hard luck, fair mistress, to will that you and yon sharp-eyed wench be together held in ward for the common weal. See ye to it," continued he, signing to an attendant lieutenant, who was none other than our old acquaintance Giles. "Nor must we forget a dark lodging for this doughty captain, mayhap the darkness will tame his fiery spirit. And you"—to another lieutenant—"go, take a company, and fetch provinder for this rat-starving place, and be sure that some good sound

Burgundy be brought, I'm minded to tarry here awhile, ere we move back to Mouse-hold."

Catherine Haselwode, turning shrinkingly away from the elated Ket, followed with Dorothy her newly-appointed jailer, who, strutting on ahead, found his road to her parlour, where he rummaged and made a careful survey, lest there should be a secret exit. He failed, however, to make any discovery, so took himself off quite satisfied, and locked the door behind him.

"Alack, Dolly!" said her mistress, when Giles had gone, "how hard hath fate pressed me since my goodsire's death! And yet, I cannot charge me with aught that's unconfessed or unabsolved. Methinks some shortcomings must, of a surety, be unthought on, else had holy Mary spared me these trials—Andrew, a homeless wanderer!—and I, Catherine Haselwode, locked in mine

own parlour, while this churlish fellow and his knaves disport them unlet about mine house! Hark! dost hear them hallooing? Welaway!"

"I beseech thee, dear mistress," answered Dorothy, "fret not thyself; this fellow's rule must surely be shortlived. Maybe these are trials sent as aids to faith, to force our thoughts heavenward from earthly cares."

"Perchance 'tis so, Dolly; but didst mark the look this Ket fastened on me with his evil eyes? 'Twas like to a snake, which hath fascinated some poor coney. Woe's me! I do afear our treatment, and can find no help for us on any side!—Yet, stay, methinks I see a gleam of chance, though 'tis but faint.—An we could dispatch word to my Lord of Northampton, who once was my father's chosen friend—although in these unhappy strifes 'twixt the Reformers and Holy Church each did

take the other side, and, instead of friends, became sturdy foes. I wot his honour, for he was ever a true knight, would not brook that his ancient comrade's daughter should be maltreated by this boastful Ket, and never a rescue be tried. Canst bethink thee of any device how a billet may be dispatched?"

"Lack a day! no, answered Dorothy," unless, in sooth, we could cozen some underling of this Ket's to carry the missive. I'll presently try the fellow who brought us in, his evil visage sheweth that he'll cheat his own master—and, now I mind me, methought I knew his face—Why! 'twas but last Whitsuntide I saw him pilloried in Windham market, and the folks said he'd overdrunk him with Whitsun ale, and stole the parson's alms—But how to write the letter?"

"That were easy done," replied Cathe-

rine, "they know not of the priest's chamber, where be writing material enough, and my chiefest treasures, too, be stowed there. He'll do our errand for the string of pearls, I trow—they were mine own dear mother's, but I must give them up to save her daughter, and thee, too, Dolly, from an unkid fate. I'll go and write the billet now, while the secret place be yet unfound."

Touching the spring, Catherine disappeared, and made her way to the priest's chamber, where she sat down and indited her letter to Lord Northampton. Reviving the memory of those days, when he was her father's boon companion, she told him of her present plight, and besought him to forget the shadow which had fallen between their friendship, and to rescue his old comrade's orphan daughter from Ket's vicious clutch. Having sealed the missive,

she enclosed it in a cover addressed to a Norwich leech, and wrote within instructions for him to forward it speedily to Lord Northampton, and, returning to Dorothy, waited for the arrival of her ill-favoured attendant.

Towards evening Master Giles came, and by his hiccoughing voice, sodden eyes, and shackling gait, was evidently in his cups; as also, from the riot and row going on through the Hall, no doubt the others were in a like condition.

Eying the shrinking women, he exclaimed—

"See here, sweet mistresses, I've got some chickweed for the caged birds by order of our glorious Captain Ket. Here's chete bread—the Captain bade me say he hath never a mancet—and a coney to pick at, currant cake and marmalade, with a flask of honey metheglim—swish,

swash, I call it. Give me rather a flagon of foaming huffcap, say I."

He then placed on the table a little tray with an air of drunken grace, and a side leer at Dorothy, of whose charms he seemed to take a ready impression, for he stood swaying backwards and forwards, smirking and ogling her.

Dorothy briskly responded to the Lothario's wicked smile by a coquettish look, which quite overcame the amorous drunkard, and he staggered twards the table where she sat.

"Marry, now! pretty one," said he, "I'd rather far a look from thy bright eyes, than a kiss from many another wench's lips, but I dare not risk a poaching on the Captain's manor, else would Peter Giles be ready to court thee against any man."

"La! sir," replied Dorothy, "sayest so? Well now, methought when first I set

eyes on thee, that fortune had favoured the mistress and her poor waiting woman, by appointing so well-favoured a gallant, and so soft spoken, to wait on us. Me thanks thee, fair sir, for thy kind speech."

Giles edged nearer and nearer to Dorothy, as the artful girl drew him on; and at last fairly sank on his knees, and offered up his devotion to her. Dorothy kept up the game, and, inwardly convulsed with laughter at the absurd red-nosed figure at her feet, killed at first sight by one shot from her mischievous eyes, fetched him a playful box on his ears, crying—

"Nay, nay, sir; but thou goest too fast, I trow. First prove thy service to be true, and then will I award thee some recompense —I say not what. Look here, Master Giles, durst do me a small favour?"

"Dare, forsooth!" broke in Giles, "egad!

I'd like to see him, who'd question my spirit!"

"See here," continued Dorothy, "'tis but a small trifle, valiant sir, yet know I not, unhappy prisoner as I be, in whose hands to trust it. This packet, as thou seest by the superscription, is for Master Rawbone, the barber leech of High Street, Norwich, and within is writ a message praying for a parcel of his powders for the meagrims"—here she sighed, and feigned to weep—"I do hear they be all potent in cheering up one's spirits, which have been mightily down of late. If then thou darest fly i' the face of Ket, and get this packet conveyed, and will show me the powders, and the leech's answer, that I may know no trick hath been played on me, thou'lt have earned a fair reward, sir, I promise thee."

"What! be that all my task, sweetling?"

answered Giles. "Come then, give me the packet, I'll send it by a sure hand, and at to-morrow's dusk you shall have an answer."

So Dorothy handed him the letter, which he hid away in his doublet, and with a languishing ogle withdrew.

When he was well gone, Catherine spoke up,—

"Gramercy! wench, I admire thy ready skill in so cajoling that bibbing villain. Heaven grant the packet be delivered safe, then we shall hear Lord Northampton's trumpets ere long, I feel light-hearted already!"

The grating of the key in the lock stopped their conversation, and the door opened to admit another visitor. Catherine's light heart leapt into her throat, as she recognised the face of her captor, wine-flushed and heated by triumph.

He now appeared clad in full knightly garb, with trunk breeches of rich velvet ribbed with gold, and doublet to match, silk hose and a velvet cap with feather. His rich dress served to contrast with his coarse features. He advanced with a debonairly-attempted bow, while Catherine, on her part, rose and made him a dignified curtsey.

Ket opened the conversation,—

"So the fates have warred against thee, fair Mistress, and thou too, like all thy compeers, art overcome by the burgher tanner of Windham, with his following of churls! Yet doth it in sooth, lady, cut me to the very quick to controul thee in thine own Hall, wherefore would I gladly see thee resume thy place by a step, which thou'lt never repent of, I trow."

"Is it not enough, Master Ket," replied Catherine, "that thou hast prevailed over

the power of a woman and her handful of retainers ; or dost thou mean to add to the injury by words of insult ? I pr'ythee let me be in quiet."

"Come, come, Mistress," answered Ket, "be not up i'the stirrups ; mayhap my lack of courtly breeding will be held an excuse for some bluntness of speech. Harken, and I will confide to thee the secret of my inmost heart,—'tis to link thy fate to mine, and to raise thee with me. I will be King Ket, and thou mayest be his Queen."

"Nay, sir," said Catherine, "that can never be. Thou wottest not I be plighted to another, whom to desert would be foul perfidy, such as a Haselwode never did. Your proffer doth in sooth honour me, who am now but your prisoner ; yet is it impossible I should yield to it."

"Ah !" cried Ket, with a frowning brow, "thou meanest Master Flowerdew, I'll

warrant? What! wouldst thou, sprung of no mean race, weigh an outlawed gentleman in the balance with his conqueror, the Captain of this great Reformation Army, at whose name the gentry tremble, at whose feet the country lies, and at whose call the people rush to arms?"

"'Tis surely hard thus to press on me," said Catherine—"I was betrothed to Master Flowerdew from my girlhood, and were I to desert him in his present pass, then should I, the last of my race, be unworthy of my name, and a very creature of scorn."

"Methinks then! Mistress, I'd best bid thee adieu, lest any should say that Ket did press his suit unduly at the first wooing. Yet I bid thee remember that 'tis no longer the tanner pleading afore the highborn Lady of Thorpe. The tables be turned,—'tis Ket, the people's Captain, bidding an imprisoned subject to yield him

her duty! When next I visit thee, mayhap I shall fare better—I give thee 'Good-night.'"

As he left the room, slamming the door behind him, Catherine's pride deserted her, and she burst into a fit of sobbing, which Dorothy tried in vain to stem. After nature had its sway, she calmed and yielded to her companion's consolations, who reasoned with her mistress, that they must strive for delay by all means, even if they stooped to deceit, till they heard the packet had been safely delivered.

Lieutenant Giles was as good as his word, for on the following evening when he brought them their supper, and had deposited the dishes on the table, he produced from his doublet, with an air of mystery, a small packet, which he handed to Dorothy, saying,—

"Thou seest, sweet wench, that I be true

to my promise, and have done thine errand —Marry! and at some risk, too. Wherefore I claim payment of thee, in accord with our compact. 'Twas a kiss on thy ripe cherry lips—an my memory serveth aright." And the gay swill-pot, diffusing liquory odours, advanced for his reward.

But the girl waved him back, crying,—

"Stay, sir, thou must not be too forward; I promised thee some substantial reward—Look here. Surely that were more to thy taste, than so unreal a gift as a passing kiss." And Dorothy put in his hands the string of pearls.

"By cock-and-pye!" exclaimed Giles, his eyes twinkling with delight, "'tis in sooth a pretty gift! Yet I do avouch I'd rather ha' had a kiss from thy honey-sweet lips, than even these sheeny pearls, which do remind me of thy satin cheeks"—and lifting them to his lips, he gravely saluted them.

Dorothy Luttrell burst into a peal of affected laughter, which Giles took complacently enough, as he retired smirking—his gallantry, however, not impelling him to return the pearls.

When his back was turned, Dorothy handed the packet to her Mistress, who broke the seal and found inside the powders, and wrapped round them a paper, on which was written a few words from the leech,—

"Powders for the meagrims, with John Rawbone's humble duty, and haste to do Mistress Haselwode's bidding."

CHAPTER XV.

" ——— Myself have lim'd a bush for her;
And placed a quire of such enticing birds,
That she will light to listen to their lays."
KING HENRY VI.

PEGGY GOODEVE was performing her weekly task in the cool, brick-floored, dairy of the homestead, where, with sleeves tucked up to her rosy elbows, she was squeezing the rich yellow clots of churned cream into the neat pats of butter which she and her mother meant to take to Windham market next day according to custom.

Although singing to herself, as she worked and kneaded her butter, Peggy had a shade of sorrow on her sunny fea-

tures, which was not to be traced there when we saw her at her Maying. Since the eventful day which followed it she had rather an uncomfortable time. Her father's stern determination—in which, too, her mother joined—to keep her sweetheart away, in consequence of his headstrong persistence in following Ket, whom and his principles the good folks had sound reason for detesting, had made matters very unpleasant for the maiden. Her life at home was no longer peaceful as before, since she had wilfully allowed herself to regard Will Dickson with all a young girl's romantic imagination, till in her simple mind he already sat enthroned, a mighty hero. It is not then to be wondered at, the more her parents' anger was roused against Will so much the more did she think he was wrongfully becalled, and clove to him with the full strength of her warm affections.

As Peggy worked away and sang, she suddenly became aware of a shadow crossing the light, and, looking up, was startled to see a man's smiling face peeping in at the little iron-barred opening, which served the double purpose of a light and a ventilation to the dairy. She stopped her song, and gazed wonderingly at him, who nimbly put a finger to his lips, with a gesture for silence, and whispered—"Hist! mistress, see here; I've brought thee a token from one who loveth thee well and true, but cannot himself come, being let by causes of which you wot not. Thou needst not rack thy brains to guess from whom the gift cometh—Look!"

Peggy, thinking of her Will, went blushingly to the lattice, and took the token, which the stranger passed through the window to her.

It was but a little gold heart, set round

with pearls, yet seemed to the girl's unsophisticated eyes far too grand an ornament for her, who was used to see jewels worn only by the quality-folk. Her blue eyes sparkled with pleasure at first sight of the treasure, and then saddened as she began to marvel how Will could have become possessed of it.

After a slight hesitation, however, she handed it back to the messenger with a shake of the head, saying,—"Nay, sir, I cannot credit that Will Dickson hath sent me the jewel. Pr'ythee take it back; I'd rather far he gave me a posey, or a scarf, such as he brought me last New Year's-day, when he took the wassail-bowl round from house to house; and I, in return, bestowed on him a silver groat, hung by a ribbon, after my sip."

"Ah! fair mistress——"

"Call me not so, sir," interrupted

Peggy, modestly, "I be but Peggy Goodeve."

The polite stranger, however, was not to be baffled, and with a waive continued, unmindful of her interruption,—

"Sweet Mistress, thou wottest how easy it hath become now-a-days for some to enrich themselves, when all the treasures of the gentle folk have fallen to the share of Captain Ket, and them whom he fancieth. I make no doubt some proud gentle hath ere to-day dispatched this very token to his sweetheart by other hands, even as I now bring it to thee."

"Nay then," answered Peggy, "I do beseech thee take it back. Methought Will had known me better than to dream I'd love to be bedecked in the rifled fallals of my betters. Return it, sir, and bid him from me to send a sweet nosegay as he was wont,"—and she held out the jewel to her

visitor, who however, with a gesture of dissent exclaimed,—

"I cry you mercy, fair damsel—be not so hard on me—bethink thee of the greeting I shall get from the sender, an I persuade thee not to take it. Pr'ythee compassionate me."

There was in the air and manner of the speaker something so irresistible to Peggy —the simple maid was quite unused to his style of talk—that, after slight hesitation, she relented and with feminine caprice hung it round her neck, saying,—

"In sooth, sir, 'twould ill become me to cause thee trouble as a recompense for thy kindness. I well know Will is hot tempered, and might take it amiss of thee, wherefore I'll have the keepsake, and thank thee kindly, sir, for thy pains."

The go-between waving his hat to her murmured an adieu, and disappeared;

leaving the romantic little maiden to her thoughts, which were of a somewhat confused nature. While persuaded that Dickson was the sender of the gift, she was, nevertheless, not quite clear in her mind as to whether she had acted right in taking it. Moreover, despite the man's politeness, there was a lurking smile about his mouth, which Peggy, as she ruminated, for the first time discovered ; together with a something in his features, which reminded her of a face she had seen before, although she could not remember when.

Altogether, Peggy felt uneasy as she continued her interrupted task.

When the golden butter had been moulded into saleable pats, she went and joined her mother, who was engaged in the kitchen boiling luscious dewberries into conserve for the winter stock.

Meantime, the messenger had briskly

gone on his way, and his actions showed him to be elated at the result of his interview with Peggy; for he cut many a lissom caper, snapped his fingers, laughed softly, and performed other pantomimic gestures of satisfaction.

Cautiously skirting the back of the yeoman's premises, where the dairy was built, so as to evade observation, he made his way rapidly across Goodeve's pastures till he entered a wood. Here, two paths branched off, right and left. Choosing that to the right, he followed it till he came to a wide common of unenclosed land, across which the path went, probably to some distant hamlet.

The common was bounded on one side by a large mere, its depths well stocked with pike, carp, eels, and perch; while on its surface wild ducks and waterfowl flapped, and long-necked hernshaws

with flocks of plovers, quails and bustards, hovered round its marshy edges. From it a sluggish streamlet meandered across the common. This he followed, and it was apparently his landmark, for the clumps of pollards, and other trees, dotted about here and there, were so much alike, that any attempt to guide himself by them would indubitably end in the traveller's bewilderment.

After some sharp walking, during which he every now and then slipped over his boot tops in the splashing soil, to the detriment of his temper, he came to a little thatched cottage, standing quite secluded under a clump of trees, which was the only habitation he had as yet met with.

The door stood ajar, and the tenant was busily engaged as he entered—without the ceremony of a knock—in her domestic

duties, boiling or stewing something in an iron pot over a stick fire.

"Aha!" exclaimed he, with a sniff of satisfaction at the savoury smell, which issued from the pot as the old female took off the lid, "getting dinner ready art thou? I shall be right glad of some victual,—my belly hath given me warning o'the clock by its craving this hour and more."

The dame took no notice of him, but continued her work, so he added to himself,—

"Oh! I forgot, deaf as an adder—marry, and not unlike! Well! maybe 'tis a gain; though bawling may cause some inconvenience to the throat, 'twere better that, than the old cat should be too sharp of hearing." Then raising his voice, he shouted in tones which the old woman could not fail to hear,—"Dinner! mother, dinner, quick!

I be part famished—and harkye, mayhap you'll have a pretty mistress here afore long to keep thee company. Wouldst take her in, treat her gently, and keep a quiet tongue if need were?"

"Ay, Master, that would I," replied the dame, turning round and disclosing her features, which were repulsive and forbidding. It was no wonder that an ugly squint, a gabbling voice, and a large projecting tooth—the only one left in her gums—together with a parchment-like skin, and scraggy figure surmounted by a high mob cap, had procured for old Bet Bolt the credit of a witch amongst the simple peasantry, by whom she was avoided as a plague. Many, too, were the tales told of children blighted by her evil eye, and the like by the credulous folk. The marvel was that she had so far escaped the ducking-stool and the faggot.

"Ay, that would I, if paid in good silver pieces for my pains, and some down at the start; but I mistrust all these fine promises of thine, Master Smartling, and would rather see the colour of thy coin than hear the chatter of thy glib tongue. Beshrew me for a fool, if I lodge thee longer without pay, an thy master doth not come soon with his pouch."

"Master, forsooth, hag!" muttered he, "S'death! I'm minded to spit thee, cat as thou art"—then aloud, "Wot ye, good dame, he whom thou callest my master, who'll be as good as a milch cow to thee, is mine own friend and comrade; and I'll not abear to hear thee call him master to my face!"

The dame with her back turned to him apparently did not hear Will Lively's harangue—for he it was—but continued talking to herself as she stirred the pot,—

"Bah! Bet can tell a true blood from a

startup, I trow, as easy as the ring 'twixt a rose noble and a base coin !"

Steps were now heard outside, and De Burgh entered the cottage. When he saw whom the visitor was, Lively, in contradiction to his former bombast, hastened to show his respect, doffing his cap with a low bow, and offering the stool, which formed the chief sitting accommodation of the place, to his patron, who flung himself down on it exclaiming,—

"A malison on this out-of-the-way place ! Here have I been on the stretch since dawn, when I left my lodging in Dereham. Egad ! I thought I had never found thee, Will. Come, tell me how your errand sped ? I scarce need ask though, for your smirky looks proclaim success. Didst see the wench ?"

"Credit me, Lord Hubert," said Lively, "I both saw and spake with her. Ay, and

have paved the way for future cooings by the gift of your keepsake, which she first refused, but afterwards took to kindly ; thinking, simple goose, 'twas from her Will and none other. This hath got me her ear, and trust me I'll soon devise some plan of liming the pretty song-bird—Gad, how sweet she trilled !—to this secluded nest."

"Well, the sooner thou dost perform thy promise, Will, the more wilt thou please me," answered De Burgh, "for to tell thee the honest truth, methinks to bide long in this forsaken den, and with nought but yon old scare-crow to gaze on, would turn me grey as a polecat, and change my fever heat to a wintry chill. But see, the dame hath got us some dinner, it smells like good rabbit stew. Come, let's fall to."

"Ay, sir," said Will, "that I will readily enough, I told her but just now my belly

rattled with very emptiness. Thank'e, dame, thank'e."

Here we must take our leave of the cottage and its occupants awhile, and follow Catherine's fortunes.

CHAPTER XVI.

"But now thy beauty is propos'd my fee,
My proud heart sues, and prompts my tongue to speak.
Teach not thy lip such scorn; for it was made
For kissing, lady, not for such contempt."

KING RICHARD III.

MISTRESS CATHERINE HASELWODE was allowed to rest awhile in quiet without being pestered by Ket's unwelcome solicitations; but Dorothy Luttrell was not so fortunate, her tippling, pimple-specked admirer eyeing her with ever increasing favour during his short visits, till at last he began to advance to further familiarity.

Dorothy was at her wit's end how to play the awkward part of keeping friends with him, and yet of repelling his particular

attentions, but the presence of her Mistress was in some degree a restraint on him.

The girl, however, was one of nature's own coquettes, so that the task was not altogether uncongenial. Occasionally she would cast him some crumbs of favour, on which he fed for a time unsatisfied.

This comfortable state of things was not always to last, and a change was at hand. Ket had been so occupied in the multifarious affairs of the commonweal, hearing plaints, patching up quarrels, and dividing plunder, that he could find no leisure to devote to the accomplishment of his pet project. Events had moved rapidly, and he was now the supreme and undisputed master of all the country round ; no one could call his goods, or scarce his life, his own.

Instead, however, of pushing on his success he seemed for the present content to

lie idle, basking in the sunshine of power, and hugging himself with the prospect of enjoying Catherine's smiles ; for he was quite persuaded that her former opposition was but a maidenly scruple, and that she would indeed be more than his ideal of a woman, if she could resist the dazzling prospect he flattered himself he had offered her. Already he had begun to act and talk as though a very King ; and had fully made up his mind to wed her, voluntarily if she would, if not by force.

At length one fine morning Lieutenant Giles announced that the Captain would honour them with a visit on that very day, and warned Catherine to prepare for him ; adding that he opined his visit was a-courting, wherefore he advised the lady to put on her best smiles for the occasion.

Having delivered his message, Giles

turned to Dorothy to pursue his own game.

"And you, sweetheart, wilt thou not bestow thyself on me at last? I'd adventure my very life to call thee mine own."

"La! Master Giles," said Dorothy, "surely thou dost not mean to offer thyself to the likes of me—just a poor waiting-maid—although, 'tis true, a brave Captain's daughter. In sooth, a potent leader, such as thou art, should mate with some well-dowered damsel."

"Marry now! there's wisdom in that, since 'tis of course that Lieutenant Giles (here the warrior swelled him pompously, and drew up his pursy figure to its full height) should wed with whom he listeth out of the many high-born damsels, who be in his power. Egad!" with a knowing wink, "I say not how many have already sighed to me, yet have not won,—

despite them, I've chose thee, sweetling, to be my wife."

"Mercy me! fair sir," simpered Dorothy, "thou, Master Ket's lieutenant, and I but a simple waiting woman! Nay then, thou jesteth with me."

"Never a bit was Peter Giles more in earnest, and set on mating with thee, pretty lass, spite of thy present strait. Trust me, I'll quick get thee out of prisonment. Why! if thou wert but a milking wench, I'd still make thee Mistress Giles. What care I, forsooth! Come, sweetheart, say yes, and dally no longer with thy good fortune."

There's no knowing to what corner poor Dorothy had been driven to evade her importunate lover, had not the door in the nick of time suddenly opened, and Ket unexpectedly entered, catching his lieutenant in the act of attempting an embrace.

"Ha!" exclaimed he, "dost dare carry on thy games here, fellow? I'm minded to send thee to cool i' the dungeon for thine impudence, cheat as thou art! Get thee gone, quick!"

Giles, whose red nose had actually paled at the sight of his Captain, began to splutter out a lame apology, but Ket cut him short, roughly:—

"Enough said, sirrah—begone!" and the dejected lieutenant slid out of the room like a whipped hound, his exit forming a ludicrous contrast to his previous boastful and grandiloquent style.

"And so, most coy of waiting maids to the coyest of mistresses," said Ket, turning to Dorothy; "thou hast been trying thine arts upon yon poor fool of a swillpot, whose head-piece is ever so fuddled with strong drink that he can scarce tell whether he standeth on his head or his heels. By St.

Peter! I can't say I admire your choice. Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed he, coarsely—"And thou, too, most dainty mistress, didst sit by and watch their billing, as became one whose troth be plighted. Ay, and I'll warrant me thou didst reprove them in a maidenly fashion, forsooth!"

"Fy on thee!" answered up Dorothy, with spirit, "to speak thus to the Mistress, and to jeer us on account of your jailer's impudence; I pray I may never set eyes on his face again."

"That, at least, I can promise thee; but you'll cozen me by no such trumpery device as this, wench, I assure you," returned Ket.

The agitated girl was about to make a sharp reply, when she was stopped by a gesture from her mistress, entreating silence, to which she at once yielded.

Ket then turned his attention to Cathe-

rine, and, possibly reflecting that his late exhibition of rage was a bad opening of his lovesuit, changed his tactics, and moderating his husky voice, assumed a coaxing tone.

"Sweet Mistress Haselwode, I beseech thee forgive my wrath, which this waiting-woman of thine, and my fellow, atween them provoked. Pr'ythee let it pass—Ket sues for thy pardon?"

"Which thou hast, freely given, sir," replied Catherine.

"Wherefore, lady, my heart bids me search yet again, if thou hast in aught relented towards me, touching the matter whereon we last talked?"

"Nay, sir," replied Catherine, "methought that was enough spoke on then, and ended for good."

"Why, mistress, surely thou art a jesting! Bethink thee; did I not promise to

return and persuade thee after a brief space? Come, tell me, sweet Kate, thou hast thought aright on my proffer. Be not hard as flint, untrue to thy very nature, but rather soft as wax, tender, womanly, and loving as befitteth thee."

Catherine, blushing, deeply indignant at these endearing epithets, firmly replied:—

"Again, sir, I do thank thee for thy favour, yet must you hold me excused; for, as I told you afore, I be the betrothed of another."

"That may be, Mistress Haselwode," cried Ket, dropping the persuasive tone, and reassuming his more natural voice and expressions; "marry! but I give thee to know, I could easy make end of him, and thou wouldst be free!"

"Ah! sir," said Catherine, "be merciful, as becometh so great a Captain, and press me not thus sorely—By thine honour,

I conjure thee—surely thou art not so savage a man as thou dost becall thyself!"

"By heaven!" burst out Ket, who, unaccustomed of late to any opposition, could ill brook her determined mien—"honour me no honour! Why dost thus cross and annoy me? I tell thee, that I be fully set to wed thee, in the stead of this favoured lover—this vagabone gentleman—this Master Flowerdew—whose deeds have scarce proved him a worthy mate for the last of thy knightly house! Put a good face on it, and force me not to try other means than loving suasion—Speak!"

Every word he uttered stung the girl to the quick, and she proudly answered him—

"What say I, ask you? This then—I will never break my plighted word; and

learn, rude upstart, that I would rather far be hewed in pieces than become thy wedded wife!"

"Heyday! sayest so? Methinks Ket, too, hath a say in the matter. Hearken, proud mistress, who hast chose to defy and scorn me. By all the calendar of thy Saints I swear thou shalt either wed with me, or worse!" With which the imperious demagogue, without another word, left her, swelling with irritation at his failure. On account of her resistance he was, nevertheless, the more resolved to achieve his end.

Next day a new attendant made his appearance, in the place of Giles, bringing orders for them to get ready to ride with the army to Mousehold, where Ket had suddenly determined to take up his headquarters. Accordingly, they hastily made preparation, and were conducted to the

court-yard, where they saw large numbers of the Reformation Army collected.

A lieutenant came forward to meet them, leading a couple of horses, between which was slung a rough litter, or sort of coach open at the sides, and the females, having mounted into the jolting vehicle, were soon started off, escorted by him with a small company of footmen.

Ket himself, so he informed them, had already gone on with the main body of his men, and had ordered all the rest to march straight to Mousehold. Probably he had some object in view, which his lying longer quiet in Thorpe would scarcely enable him to accomplish.

Mistress Catherine, as she rode along with her unmannerly escort of churls and riff-raff, whose coarse language, often reaching her unaccustomed ears, filled her with fright and disgust, felt most acutely the

indignity of her position, and, even more so, her inability to resent it. The sight of her court-yard filled with wrangling fellows and stolen herds, and the contrast it now presented to the days when she used to ride out a-hawking with her retainers—or when, in the time of Sir Denys, crowded with a gay company of jousters, gallant knights and gentlemen, and fair ladies, she reigned the queen of the sports—made her wretched; and to render her misery complete, as she passed under the vaulted gateway, she saw through the grated window the wan face of her old Captain, and heard him murmur with bated breath, "God keep thee, lady."

"Dost mind, Dolly," said she, after a long silence, "when, but three short years agone, our gay jousts were held in honour of my birthday, and I was Lady Paramount?"

"Alack! yes, dear mistress," answered Dorothy, "'tis, in sooth, a marvellous change. I well remember thou wast tired with pearls, and wore a flowered damask gown, and sat on the dais beneath the canopy which was built at yonder end of the green. Nor have I forgot the gallant stranger, whose harness was all black, save only a scarlet plume in his visor—how he unhorsed Sir Ralph Godfrey, and afterward was in turn borne down by Master Flowerdew, who was adjudged the victor, and right well won the crown which thou didst place across his brow. La, me! 'tis an unkid sight to see, and a harder far to credit."

Mistress Catherine and her companion were thus pursuing their gossiping reminiscences when the lieutenant— whose previous calling had been that of a cordwainer—rode up, and placing his hand

familiarly on the side of the vehicle, said,—

"Come, my Mistress, I've orders from the Captain to have never a bit of talking o'the march; wherefore, if the men be forbid to talk, I be sure the prisoners must keep a still tongue. So stop thy prattle, and bid thy waiting wench cease her whimper. Marry! rather than whine, ye ought both to be proud of the great Captain's favour —'tis not all the lily-handed gentlewomen who have been thus softly treated. I could tell thee of Mistress Betty Beckingham, who was forced to marry with Lieutenant Maycock—ay, and pretty Dame Mary, too, wife to young Sir Richard Soynds, who was slain at the sacking of his house, she was wedded to Reuben Makepeace, the currier of Lowestoft. See—this was the ring the Knight wore on his midfinger"—holding out his hand to show a glittering

ring which looked singularly out of place there. "Ket himself gave it me; for, wot ye, 'twas I fired the shot which broke the proud Knight's sword-arm atwain, and then he was easily finished off by Bob Onion and his lads."

Apparently the prohibition of talking did not apply to the Lieutenant, for he monopolised all the talk, till Dorothy, indignant at his free manner to her mistress, and sick of his uncongenial speech, interrupted him.

"What! thou the fellow who shot brave Sir Richard, and boastest of the coward deed? Fy on thee, Dick Betts, of Sheep-street, Windham! Take thy hand off my lady's litter."

"Marry come up! you shall rue this tongue license," returned Betts. "I'll have a proper payment, you saucy jade."

"In sooth you're a courtly tender on a

gentlewoman," answered Dorothy, "methinks you're better suited to cobbling than to riding a-horseback, and better used to sewing curried hide for treswells than to sit astride it—right gallant Knight of the Boot !"

Betts purpled with rage at the spirited girl's reply, and half raised his whip, as though to give her a switch ; but remembering the care he had been ordered to take of them by Ket, and the respect they were to be treated with, he thought better of his intention.

Mistress Catherine, too, interfered,—

"Keep still, Dolly—and, sir lieutenant, do you bear in mind that you first provoked her wrath by your uncourteous bearing. I warn you, that if we be further annoyed, I will appeal to Captain Ket, who will award you some speedy punishment."

Betts glowered at the women, but the

threat of an appeal to Ket operated in their favour, for he had no wish to swing, and had a wholesome dread of the absolute rule of his chief, which he had seen exercised on several already.

So, with a dissatisfied grunt, he fell back and suffered them to continue their talk uninterrupted.

END OF VOL I.

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